

Title of Grant: Art Appreciation: Emphasizing Authentic Writing and Collaboration in an Online Art History Course

SP2008 – 135P – PF

Date of Funding: Spring 2008

Name: Kate Simpson

College: Lord Fairfax Community College (LFCC)

Email: ksimpson@lfcc.edu

Abstract:

By revising an existing online course to increase interactivity, collaboration, writing, and research, student learning will strengthen and deepen. Using asynchronous discussion board, students collaborate to solve problems; they share Web search results and write about new knowledge gleaned as they move from novice to expert learners. Synchronous chat allows us to take students on virtual field trips where they respond to art authentically. Group projects encourage students to learn and then teach others, validating and strengthening their expertise. Rubrics for self, peer, and instructor evaluation clarify student learning objectives and assessment tasks by structuring assignments to build success.

Actual Outcomes:

Student outcomes based on course assessment and student surveys suggest the response to course revision was positive. Greater variety of learning activities reduced the dependency on textbook reading to make the course more interesting by breaking the monotony of extensive reading. The course was less demanding for students with poor reading skills and provided other opportunities for them to learn the course content.

Students found group activities motivated them to engage with the content and with each other to a much greater extent. Group work included: Student-defined projects; Writing to explore and clarify learning and perspectives; Opportunities to report on topics of interest, such as current events that are art-related. Group discussions (synchronous and asynchronous) helped students build confidence, share a variety of perspectives, and consider the course content as alive rather than simply a textbook that had to be read. Group projects will encouraged students to work together to brainstorm answers to questions and share their learning in interactive settings. As groups identified an artistic style or theme, learned about it, and then presented findings to the class, they deepened their knowledge base. Rather than a research paper that the instructor alone reads, this learning was valuable because the rest of the class learned what the student found most compelling.

Previously, the students were reluctant to write about art. Many of them did not have college-level writing skills. Working as a group encourages participation in projects that required writing about art. With so many valuable resources available online, often students did not know where to begin to find artists and their work. Those who hadn't ever been to a museum weren't familiar with the skills associated with the experience. Going on a virtual field trip allowed the instructor to guide students to areas and selections that they were learning about in the text. Students discussed samples using terminology and responded as if they were walking the halls of an art museum. Once they learned about conducting searches and using online resources, they were prepared to do the same independently.

Then when it was time for them to present on their artist or style, they could take the class on the same kind of field trip or make a collection of examples to illustrate their concept. The professor will continue to introduce lecture material through the voice and image technology available in Blackboard.

Other Colleges:

Dr. Kate Simpson and Professor Lahna Neely planned to present these findings at a Tech Summit that included Lord Fairfax Community College professors and Rappahannock Community College professors, but icy conditions prevented that presentation. Dr. Kate Simpson will present on June 27th at the Tech Summit held that day and will submit the proposal to be shared at New Horizons next spring.

Discussion and Critique:

It appears that the ability to work in groups may be a KEY indicator of a student's engagement in an online course. Those who won't participate may not be willing to spend time on the course, learning very much, or deepening their knowledge base.

Group Quizzes were to encourage participation, problem solving, and learning. Benefits: "I probably would not have an A in the class if it was not for the group. They don't give me answers but guide [me] where to look and even sometimes they just answer a simple technical question about when something is due or when to post it." Drawbacks: In some groups, the students are listing just answers (T/F, etc.) instead of discussing them. Weak students simply copy the answers.

Negative results: Some students did not participate or waited until the last 15 minutes of the week before logging in. Some students do not prepare for the discussion topic—answering "off the top of their heads," or copying answers from those already submitted. The best writers are the ones doing more writing, which doesn't benefit the weaker writers. "I don't like how we have group assignments to be honest."

Concerns: Motivation. Shared Responsibility Are the reluctant and non-participating students an unfair burden to the active students? Should non-participating students be moved out of the group? Will they even know that they have been moved?

Assessment questions:

- Does the tone of the conversation change as learners advance through the course material?
 - Results are inconclusive—professor tailored discussion topics to what she thought they could comprehend. In some cases, yes. Students stopped repeating what other students said and began to share their own thoughts and move the conversation forward.
- Can generalization be made about social interaction?
 - Students in pilot group internalized concepts to a greater extent and were clearly more involved in the course on a regular basis.
- Is there evidence to show that individual learners and the entire class increased their level of sophistication regarding critical thinking?
 - Based on the critical thinking projects, students who worked in groups participated, put pressure on themselves and other group members, and were concerned about the quality of the projects.

- Some students (in the other online Art course) calculated grades and realized they didn't have to do an assignment in order to "pass" the class. Others handed in material that was copied, garbled, or showed only surface-level understanding.

Evaluation:

Course Assessment:

- Greater variety in graded activities (less emphasis on tests).
- Use of rubrics to guide students through the learning process and clarify objectives
- More opportunities for students to work together to build expertise.
Students completed anonymous surveys three different times throughout the course. Results are detailed in the PowerPoint and hard copies are located in LFCC office #160A.

Dissemination:

I will disseminate these findings at Tech Summit on June 27th and again at New Horizons in Spring 09.