

Using digital video to make visible the non-verbal communication and interaction in communication and leadership courses

G. Andersson, S. Larsen, and H. Wu

Østfold University College, Department of Engineering, Sarpsborg, Norway

“Organization theory, communication and leadership for vocational training programs” is a 30 credits course focusing on interdisciplinary interaction, communication and conflict resolution. This approach makes the course suitable for many on-campus and lifelong learning programs. Main target groups include, but are not limited to college of engineering, college of education and school of nursing. Traditional courses on these topics are strong on the written and explicit part of communication but fail in large to meet the challenges in non-verbal communication and interaction. To better target the challenges we use an approach including real life cases, role-play, multimedia and ongoing analyzes, replacing traditional lectures with student guidance, dialogue and interaction in a flexible team oriented learning environment. This paper present one possible infrastructure using teams of academics, case studies, learning management systems (LMS) and digital video-recordings. Further we discuss and reflect on our experiences with student guidance, dialogue and interaction in a flexible team oriented learning environment using digital video as one key component. The course presented uses case studies focusing on interaction practices. The case studies includes the use of digital video to make visible the non-verbal communication and interaction. The digital recordings form the basis of the supplementary work and analyzes both on-campus in the teams and off-campus using Internet. Reflections and dialogs on the digital materials are core activities and depend on repeatedly play back, editing and sharing. The intention of our new approach is not necessarily for students to solve the misunderstanding or conflict in the case, but to be able to recognize and understand the dynamics of such a situation. ICT and web based applications are used where practical to preposition learning in a diverse student group emphasizing on flexibility and universal accessibility. The study is closely surveyed using online surveys, logs and interviews as part of a research and development project funded by The Norwegian University Agency for Flexible Learning and others.

Keywords Case studies, interaction, learning management systems, digital video and student guidance.

1. Introduction

“Organization theory, communication and leadership for vocational training programs” is a 30 credits course focusing on interdisciplinary interaction, communication and conflict resolution. This approach makes the course suitable for many on-campus and lifelong learning programs. Main target groups include, but are not limited to, college of engineering, college of education and school of nursing.

Traditional courses on these topics are strong on the written and explicit part of communication but fail in large to meet the challenges in non-verbal communication and interaction. To better target the challenges we use an approach including real life cases, role-play, multimedia and ongoing analyzes, replacing traditional lectures with student guidance, dialogue and interaction in a flexible team oriented learning environment.

This paper present one possible infrastructure using teams of academics, case studies, learning management systems (LMS) and digital video-recordings. Further we discuss and reflect on our experiences with student guidance, dialogue and interaction in a flexible team oriented learning environment using digital video as one key component.

The course presented uses case studies focusing on interaction practices. The case studies includes the use of digital video to make visible the non-verbal communication and interaction. The digital recordings form the basis of the supplementary work and analyzes both on-campus in the teams and off-campus using Internet. Reflections and dialogs on the digital materials are core activities and depend on repeatedly play back, editing and sharing.

The intention of our new approach is not necessarily for students to solve the misunderstanding or conflict in the case, but to be able to recognize and understand the dynamics of such a situation. ICT and web based applications are used where practical to preposition learning in a diverse student group emphasizing on flexibility and universal accessibility.

The study is closely surveyed using online surveys, logs and interviews as part of a research and development project funded by The Norwegian University Agency for Flexible Learning and others.

2. Infrastructure and context

The project is based on a team of academics from college of education and college of engineering at Østfold University College. Our teaching and research interests ranges from drama and pedagogic to leadership and technology enabled learning. Three of us have a history of collaboration in technology-enabled flexible learning projects. Unique for this project is the expertise in drama and theater needed.

Traditional classroom teaching dominates in higher education. We often refer to this as a teacher-centered approach to teaching in contrast to a student-centered approach. In many settings the teacher-centered approach is very effective, but it also have several weaknesses. Implicit it assumes that knowledge is something that can be transmitted and that can be accumulated in a linear fashion. Many learning theories would suggest that these are incorrect assumptions. Knowledge needs to be individually constructed by the learner [1]. Learners need to be actively engaged in the process [2]. Learners clearly have different learning styles, and do not learn at the same pace [3]. These theories suggest changes in our approach to higher education to greater focus on the learner than the teacher [4] [5].

Case studies in education may be linked to the student-centered approach as one of many “active learning” approaches. Wikipedia traces the phrase case study or case study back as far as 1934, after the establishment of the concept of a case history in medicine. From its origin in medicine and research it is now more and more common used in higher education.

“The case study offers a method of learning about a complex instance through extensive description and contextual analysis. The product articulates why the instance occurred as it did, and what one might usefully explore in similar situations.” Wikipedia.org

Traditional courses on Organization theory, communication and leadership are often strong on the written and explicit part of communication but fail in large to meet the challenges in non-verbal communication and interaction. To better target these challenges we chose case study as our method to better target and address the complex objectives.

A significant part of the learning activities are based on case studies and interaction exercises. The exercises include use of digital video to make visible non-verbal communication and interaction in a given scenario. The digital recordings form the basis of the supplementary work and analyzes both on-campus in the teams and off-campus using Internet. Reflections and dialogs on the digital materials are core activities and depend on repeatedly play back, editing and sharing. To help facilitate the course and make the play back, editing and sharing of digital video manageable we used the college learning management system (LMS) Blackboard. In addition, the LMS were used to supplement the face-to-face classroom activities and shared areas for file exchange and communication were established for each group. Dedicated workshops on using the LMS and edit and share digital video were held. Seminars on library, reference and knowledge search skills were held.

Course structure and course schedule are shown in Table 1 and 2.

Table 1 Course Plan Semester 1

Week	37	39	42	44	46	48
Theme	Intro.	Library	Theory	Library	Theory	Case
Theme	LMS	Theory	Case	Theory	Theory	Case

Table 2 Course Plan Semester 2

Week	2-10	10	13	16	18
Theme	Field	Reflections	Theory	Case	Case
Theme	practice		Case	Case	Evaluation

3. More on case studies, role-plays and video analysis

Every group has to present at least one case. The case should be based on situations from real life experiences in the student group and match the given criteria.

- A background description on the persons or actors in the case
- A situation description that includes circumstances, where and when this happened
- Discussions on how the case relate to the theories used
- Discussions on what a conflict is and what colors and shapes may it take

The role-play shall normally not exceed 10 minutes. Everyone in the group must participate and engage in the acting play. This means everyone in the group must act as a person during a communicative and interactive situation. Everyone shall observe and contribute his/her own acting to develop the role-play in the wished direction.

Every group needs to make a video recording of 3-5 minutes based on the role-play. The team will publish the video for the class to study and analyze the situations and conflicts in the case in a seminar. Then their opponent group will present theirs analyze followed by an open class discussion.

4. Methods

The study is closely surveyed using online surveys, logs and interviews as part of a research and development project funded by The Norwegian University Agency for Flexible Learning and others.

We used the survey services provided in the university college LMS for feedback from the students. This is done using surveys and survey feedback discussions. Immediate after the survey deadline and an initial analyze of the responses we post a survey summary on the course pages. Comments and corrections on the summary are encouraged (but not compulsory) and guided to a dedicated discussion board in the LMS.

5. Results and discussion

A total of four surveys were run during the two-semester course: October, December, January and April. All built after a common template with a combination of multiple choice and open-ended questions. There were few postings on survey summaries posted immediate after the initial analyzes. The full class was 30 students and there are both full-time and part-time students in the class. For data collections, the responding rates varied from survey to survey.

Table 3 Survey Summary Work Place (Multi-choice)

Questions\Evaluation	1/2004 (N=23)	2/2004 (N=6)	3/2005 (N=21)	4/2005 (N=10)
I read/work mostly at				
- My home	87.0%	100.0%	95.0%	100.0%
- My workplace	0%	16.7%	9.5%	10.0%
- During the gathering	69.6%	83.3%	71.4%	90.0%
- Other places	17.4%	0%	4.8%	20.0%

Table 4 Survey Summary (Single-choice)

Questions\Evaluation	1/2004 (N=23)	2/2004 (N=6)	3/2005 (N=21)	4/2005 (N=10)
Work on the course	5.8 average	6.5 average	6.0 average	6.9 average
	Ranking from 3 to 8	Ranking from 4 to 8	Ranking from 3 to 9	Ranking from 5 to 8
(1=poorest, 10=best)				
My expectations reached	6.7 average	6.2 average	5.7 average	5.9
	Ranking 3 to 10	Ranking 3 to 8	Ranking 2 to 8	Ranking 2 to 9
(1=poorest, 10=best)				

Though the survey outcomes seem to vary over the course period, there are some elements that can be read from the tables:

- The students work mostly at home and on the gatherings
- Gatherings seems to be an important event
- Other places such as libraries seem not to be any common place for working with lectures
- Students tend to make greater and greater efforts in their work
- Students' expectations to the course were best in the beginning of the course

There are both full-time and part-time students in the class. Working at home becomes a common pattern for most students, even for full-time students. Self-conducted study and self-organized study approach seems to be a common pattern for many. This are also confirmed by the students, on their preferable working time; at evenings or weekends.

Guidance and dialogue with the supervisors and instructors is a vital part of the learning process. The gatherings are therefore considered as important and used for both technical details, discussions on core theories and networking/team building.

Our findings indicate that the students put down an increased workload on the learning activities. Theirs expectations to the course seems to decrease. This might have indicated the up and down phases of their learning curve: Even if they work harder and harder, they might face greater challenges. In this perspective it seems that the expectations to the course were highest at the course start-up.

“Course was well organized. Professional lecturers.” Survey 1, 2, 3: Most satisfying

“Self-responsibility for own learning. Spent little bit time for getting familiar with LMS, appreciated this LMS way of working which is very flexible. That fits very well for me when I am working and having the kids” Survey 1: Most satisfying

“Lectures are fun and beneficial, especially the role-play part.” Survey 2: Most satisfying

“Quick feedback from lecturers and supervisors by email.” Survey 2, 3, 4: Most satisfying

“Freedom to work independently with assignments.” Survey 4: Most satisfying

“No inspiration to work online, and wish to have more/longer lectures” Survey 3: Least satisfying

These are citations from the student surveys. The students are divided in the evaluation of the most/least satisfying elements of the course. Though this is a common dividing phenomenon for many classes, it is still interesting to notice these opinions/observations.

- Enthusiastic vs. frustrated about the course organization and content
- Positive vs. negative to LMS
- Fun and well organized vs. abstract and hard lectures
- Good vs. more direct and detailed supervising/guiding
- Relevant vs. not relevant cases

Why these distinctions and contradictions in the group of students?

“Exciting (but also scared) with video filming, which is a good assignment for us” (Survey 1: Most satisfying)

Maybe the combination of “exciting” and “scared” is the key to understand the duality in the student responses. The best blend of excitement and challenge are different for different students.

The course has a mixture of full-time and part-time students. Observations in the classroom and a few in depth research interviews indicate a clear difference between these two groups in their opinions and attitudes toward course organization, online learning activities and motivations for the study.

The full-time students are usually young, often enrolled directly from secondary school and inexperienced in their profession work. They are not used to the flexible structure in higher education, LMS and a student centered approach to learning.

The part-time students are active in their profession as teachers and take the course in addition. They generally have a busier workload but may compensate with their work experience. They appreciated the flexible structure and LMS.

There are several good reasons for combining the two student groups as done in this project. However, the differences outlined also create big challenges on how we do it.

“Do not combine the fulltime and part-time students together” (Survey 2: Suggested improvement)

It is a challenging task for the course facilitators to mix them into one group.

6. Openings and Challenges

Role-play seems to be the most exciting and efficient approach for learning about non-verbal communication skills for both student groups:

“Exciting and interesting lectures in communication” *“Exciting (but also scared) with video filming, which is a good assignment for us”* *“Lectures are fun and beneficial, especially the role-play part.”*

There were no critical or negative comments on the role-play part in the surveys. There were only positive feedbacks on this new to many learning activity. We think this approach makes the theories becoming more alive and understandable. New technologies used with the possibilities of easy recording, sharing and continuous work on the recordings adds flexibility and student control of the content.

The current study has presented one possible infrastructure using teams of academics, case studies, LMS and digital video-recordings. The innovative part of the course organization was combining role-

play (active, emotions and expressions) and analysis (written and documentation based thinking and reflections), as well as LMS application for this blend in practice.

Further we discussed and reflected on our experiences with student guidance, dialogue and interaction in a flexible team oriented learning environment using digital video as one key component. We think the LMS applied non-verbal interaction learning environment provides new openings for pedagogical experiments and debates. The project also combines full-time and part-time students. If successful the combination may result in increased learning and reduce the resources necessary. In a pedagogical perspective this will also create a richer learning environment and increased variation in learning activities, better suited to address the course objectives [6].

The challenges are many. In this study the blend of full-time and part-time students proved a bigger challenge than expected. But we also have the more general art of balancing; technology vs. content, role-play vs. written analysis, flexibility vs. structure. The role as facilitator is important, especially on how to help the teams to succeed.

We are happy to recommend this approach including real life cases, role-play, multimedia and ongoing analyzes, replacing traditional lectures with student guidance, dialogue and interaction in a flexible team oriented learning environment. Reflections and dialogs on the digital materials using repeatedly play back, editing and sharing proved to be very effective to address the non-verbal communication awareness and diagnostic skills among the students. Our intention was not necessarily for students to solve the misunderstanding or conflict in the case, but to be able to recognize and understand the dynamics of such a situation. We evaluate this part as a success.

References

- [1] Dahlgren, L. 1984. Outcomes of learning. Eds. Marton, Hounsell, Entwistle: The Experience of Learning. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press
- [2] Kolb, D.A. 1984. Experiential learning: experience as the source of learning and development. Prentice Hall
- [3] Honey, P. A. Mumford. 1986. Using your learning styles. 2. Ed. P. Honey
- [4] Gibbs. G. 1981. Teaching students to learn. Milton Keynes. Open University Press
- [5] Gibbs. G. 1988. Learning by doing. FEU. London
- [6] Jones, Norah & Peachey, Paul, "The Development of Socialization in an On-line Learning Environment", The Journal of Interactive Online Learning, Volume 3, Number 3, Winter 2005, <http://www.ncolr.org/jiol/archives/2005/winter/toc.html>