Chapter 11
Evaluating Learning Technologies

INTRODUCTION

In this penultimate chapter of the book, I will continue with my discussion of how we can take advantage of these youth interests and practices with ICTs for enhancing learning and teaching by actually evolving ways to evaluate these communication and learning environments.

As with most chapters in the book, I focus on a case study as a way to give an in-depth study to the subject matter. In this case, interactivity is the subject matter. Interactivity was discussed at length in the previous chapter, leading the creation of a new learning theory, the Conversational Learning Theory, and a new learning model, the Conversational Learning Community. Rather than explaining the concept and the learning theory and model again in this chapter, I refer the reader back to

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the previous chapter. Once the basic tenets of these concepts are grasped the reader can now begin to read the discussion about how to increase interactivity in learning environments.

MEASURES TAKEN TO ACHIEVE INTERACTIVITY

Having offered a comprehensive background account of interactivity in chapter 10, ending with a specific idea of what it is within the confines of our notion of conversation learning community, I shall in this section first describe two web-based courses which form the basis for this discussion about interactivity. Following this brief description, I shall then outline measures taken and activities done to achieve interactivity in these two courses.

A Description of Two Web-Based Courses

I have now explained a number of issues, including web-based teaching, and interactivity and its role in constructivist teaching methods. I will in the rest of the chapter provide a description of specific courses within my web-based teaching programme, and how interactivity was achieved in the course design. I begin with the choices available for a course designer.

Web-Based Course Design via WebCT

Web-based teaching on the ‘open internet’ i.e. without a course tool such as WebCT, Blackboard, etc. can create a number of problems. First, it may be difficult, as course designer, to manipulate access to the material in terms of passwords and accounts for the learners. Second, many other interactive features such as bulletin boards, chat rooms, and secured records for student activities may not be possible. As such, one can hardly design and implement the conceptual notion of conversational learning community that I have referred to above.

In order to solve the above problems, we decided to do course design via WebCT. Further development of WebCT course design has led to the award of a joint Teaching Development Grant (TDG) titled, The Use of Information Technology in the Teaching of Language and Linguistics courses. Further information on the project may be found at the project website at the following address: (http://www.hku.hk/linguist/staff/TDGBodomo.html)

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