

## Mike Donoghue

### OMDE 610 - Journal Entries

#### **#1 – Sept. 21**

Read Terry Anderson’s piece called “Towards a Theory of Online Learning” with an eye for what to write for the class conference threads. I was going to write on the bias that Anderson started the piece with, but I wasn’t sure I had it right. The bias I detected was his premise that all theories need a model. I don’t agree with that – I think models help explain things (heck, I like them more than written text sometimes), however, I don’t think they are a necessity nor do I think that all theories can be broken down into models. While there are many things that can be represented in a graph or chart, I think there is also a certain level where it’s too confusing – unless there is someone who can break it down more simply. I remember seeing Edmund Tufte speak in Boston and going over some of the material he had in his books – he was great at taking material like that and making it more accessible (“real”).

#### **#2 - Sept. 24**

I find myself a bit cloudy on how to differentiate an opinion from a theory. The class discussions on the subject really helped define how many of think an opinion is a theory, which can be confusing. I think it really can stem from an opinion, but I guess the problem gets to be that a theory needs a different approach when you try and prove or disprove it. We can see that opinions might be based on our own non-scientific observations, without controls, or any kind of documented results, and then think “Oh wow! It must be true!” While it might be true, there certainly needs to be a better process in place for others to say “You’re right!” or “That’s boloney!” (or something more salty than that). Also, this brings to mind an old frustration I had when my brother would come home from school and a teacher would ask him his opinion only to tell him that he’s wrong. How can you be wrong about an opinion??!! But that brings up another point – a theory needs to have the ability to be proven if it is wrong or right – it can’t just sit out there invulnerable to facts, etc. That is something I hadn’t really worked out until I started writing here.

#### **#3 - Sept. 27**

After coursing through some material on interactivity, some insight struck me (that I’m guessing someone has espoused about somewhere) regarding the degree of interaction that could occur between classes, fields of study, etc. when (or if) we ever get to that point. I was thinking that since the design of classes is changing to adapt/adopt to technological change as well as how we define education, there will soon be a point where we have a more “relational” design to courses. OK, I’m showing my tech side again, but what I mean by that vague term is that I think there is more potential for sharing (like communal learning) of materials, ideas, and so forth between these classes so long as we make meaningful connections. For example, if two different classes (or even, two different offerings of the same class) are reading the same material, is there potential for moments of integration where we “bump” into each other and get each other’s take on the material? Would we process it differently and could we share that information so we all feel a little more enlightened? There are points of

integration where we simply share papers of course so as to reduce logistical headaches, but there are possibilities where either an automated function or great online editor could help us look beyond our designated space and into other areas that might share concepts, principles, and so forth.

Moving beyond silo thinking and practices – I wonder if we'll see it and to what degree?

#### **#4 - Sept. 30**

As an add-on to my previous note, I just wanted to really emphasize how much it struck me how traditional teaching methods (that I grew up with, fossil that I am) could evolve to be something quite unrecognizable from what many of us were used to throughout most of our educational lives. Admittedly, there is always the challenge of standardization (making all classes, access, and other criteria equal), but of also allowing individuality. So many directions this could possibly go – and maybe that is the way it should be approached --- without true standardization.

I could go on about that, however, I wanted to mention that I'm trying to "get in the groove" of the class. Starting late, extra work at home and at the "office" such as it is, and the late night shenanigans of my family have made it difficult to find the time to do the proper readings and try and reply prior to last day of our discussion periods. I am just getting organized (he said with Murphy's Law in mind) so I'm hoping I can get a jump on readings and be ready for upcoming weeks instead of flailing about like I have been so far.

#### **#5 – Oct 2**

Oh boy... This upcoming assignment is bigger than a breadbox. I am going through the process of looking at the week one postings by my classmates to get a heads up. I annotated a copy of the article and I see where I missed the boat the first time I went through it – I had originally thought Ally had come up with this theory combination on his own, come to find out that it is a commonly held theory in the field of learning. His article had some good ideas – I think he could have done a better job organizing this paper thought if he cited more from the theories and demonstrated where his design ideas meshed.

#### **#6 – Oct 6**

Well – it's done. I missed the word count for the critique paper and I'm not pleased. I had some false confidence about this past week (i.e., getting caught up) so now I'm behind on readings again in order to complete the assignment. I got it out the door at a minute or two past midnight with approximately 1800 words (goal, just under 2500). My fellow students were having a field day of it too – even the ones I thought were in a better place than I!

I would have liked to have done the research through the UMUC library to find the details I needed on educational theory so I could review them against Ally's implications outlines. I found some of his material erratic and feel I could help bolster his insights with details from the theories. At least the exercise helped me get more in touch with the three horsemen of the Apocalypse (i.e., the three "schools of thought" or theories).

Constructivism is hot on our topic discussions. It is interesting that much of its premise requires you to unlearn before you can learn. This is something I think people in information tech do so often and well – change their education repeatedly because the technology around them changes. If you’re not adaptable, you put yourself at risk too. I remember teams I worked with feeling jealous of others because they were stuck in old tech and wanted to move on to new tech.

#### **#7 – Oct 8**

Boy, some readings require some rereading or special note (i.e., translation) taking. Kirschner was a tough go (I think he made up some words – I’ll have to check), but I liked his idea of “affordances” (things that provide an individual to perform an action). There are devices, interfaces, etc. that just sit there but then there are others that clearly suggest that they are designed to be held by your hand (special grip handles, steering wheels, etc.), get clicked by your mouse (graphic interfaces, touchscreens, etc.), or whatever. Design studies and psychological studies must really go to town on telling designers how something will function better or how to engage people to use something more often, and so forth.

#### **#8 – Oct 12**

Wow! What a difference an author makes! Wilson who we just read is like a break in the clouds. I liked his self-effacing way of communicating. The piece we read certainly made me realize that the lofty tower of theorists is really only built on the perceptions of peers and devotees. There are a number of memorable quotes from Wilson, all of which have things to say about how while instructional design should follow educational theory, there are times when theory isn’t the right answer and the experience of the designer needs to be exercised.

How open and honest! Use what you can, discard the rest! Don’t assume that one answer is the right answer or that theorists know all the answers.

#### **#9 – Oct 14**

While I do enjoy asynchronous learning (and, let’s face facts, could not take my class without it), I see the value in some “live” form of teaching. The problem is that I think I would be sitting quietly in the background, particularly if it was a large group – like our class. Also, I think I would feel intimidated by the experience of some members and what they bring to the table.

At my “maturity” level, you would think I could get over that. It is an effort and I try to bluster my way through these socially-uncomfortable moments, but I am a more reflective person and prefer to talk from well-digested facts. In some ways, I think that makes me a coward – I hate to appear foolish or stupid and I have often made light of myself to get out of embarrassing situations. Otherwise, I am angry at how I have performed.

Small groups might be the answer though. Having the right mixture of people makes a difference as well. I must say that my experience as an online student have been 99.99% positive and the body of learners have contributed to that.

I wonder if this would change if we had a face-to-face class?

#### **#10 - Oct 15**

The role of the online teacher is difficult one. I remember reading Holmberg in my first class at UMUC and not liking his use of the word “tutor” as someone who is an online educator. I thought the name diminished the role of professors. I guess if I keep my mind open, it can be a more broad interpretation – such as, a professor can be a tutor, but a tutor may not always be a professor. By that I think we can identify a “presenter” in an online class as not always having the same credentials as professor. They could be a teaching assistant, etc. and not necessarily have the same depth of understanding of the topic.

Anyway, the more I come to understand how the world of DE works, the more work I see is necessary for educators. The asynchronous environment is very demanding for a teacher that truly wants students to learn. For me it also levels the playing field a bit – in my earlier life, I respected (feared) teachers in college and didn’t approach them with questions, etc. Also, the dynamics of taking f2f courses had other issues (too many students in a class, competition with others, scheduling for interaction, and so forth).

Online takes care of a lot of problems – mine at least ;)

#### **11 – Oct 18**

I used to think that teachers that moved online did it all – or that at least they worked closely with an Instructional Designer for technical and implementation reasons. Then I realized how involved the process was and thought the opposite – that they had little involvement and potentially negligible involvement with respect to teaching a class.

Now I see that it is more complicated than that – and a lot more dependent on the teacher in ways I had not considered.

School and educator politics aside, there are many levels involved as to how to invoke an online course. I had no real comprehension of theory and how it might impact the design of a course. Much of my training and practical experience has looked at these kinds of deliverables as being derived from “best practices” and basic guidelines. Theory was never included – perhaps because it seems so “lofty” and removed from the everyday.

#### **12 – Oct 20**

The term “politics” is interesting (we discussed it in class recently with respect to education). Some of it hit people because it related to home schooling but other comments with about the subtle and not so subtle agenda concerns that are communicated through an educational process.

Strange – I guess we all have politics in our minds, but we may not use the word (it all comes down to words again, doesn’t it?). Even when we think we are trying to give students the freedom to make their

own decisions, come to their own conclusions, and so forth, THAT is also a political statement. It really can't be avoided, despite the honey-coating we give it – politics = point of view = agenda = blah, blah.

### **13 – Oct 21**

Positive and negative feedback are tough concepts for me. I prefer positive (as do many of us), but I admit that I respond to negative more quickly since it is often an “in the moment” stimulus. Sure, I can let something sit in the back of my head and fester so that it makes me do something in the future – those memories seem to last longer for some twisted reason. I would prefer, however, to let positive motivation be my guiding force.

Is it my critical nature speaking up? Am I not used to praise? I know that I many times will downplay compliments (even when a voice inside me is going “Oh WOW! I did it!!”) – I think that's because I feel like it's a ladder waiting to be pulled out from under me.

How much of me is still stuck in adolescence...

The tone of the online classroom is very rewarding with respect to both praise and criticism. Some of that is because the members are adults and we are supportive of each other. It also is somewhat helpful to reflect on how my various online instructors have been involved with the class. I have no doubt that personalities will intervene at some point, but I have been impressed with how, despite what I perceive are considerable demands, the responses in our “classrooms” have been more even-handed and thought-provoking.

When I graduate – will I have what it takes to incorporate those skills and be an effective teacher? That will be some internal training too.

### **14 – Oct 23**

I remember Mom giving me the Myers-Briggs test some time ago and realizing what an eye-opener it was for me. I believe she retested me a few years after that and I was the same – not sure what that says about me, but I assume there were some variances.

INFP – It's hard to accept some times in that I feel that “what I am” is determining my role in life. Sure, we can all choose to jump out of ourselves, but the path of our tendencies makes it difficult to change direction.

Still, the material I'm gathering in the course through readings, conversations, and internal processing seem to support that reflection is an important characteristic when developing online courses. Trying to determine what is needed by others is something I do with my writing job as well.

### **15 – Oct 26**

Gathering material for an annotated bibliography is tough for me. I guess I wanted to be more leisurely about my approach to a topic – let the ideas flow over me and then come up with something pithy and that had a new angle on it (what an affected twit I can be). I just want to be original and have material

that people will enjoy reading (including myself). My business writing is certainly not as satisfying and the articles I write for my monthly column are often dry unless I spend a considerable amount of time on them. But enough bellyaching...

What I am interested in writing about is how established teachers adapt to going into online learning. It is a bit bigger than a breadbox when you consider that:

1. People are individuals and have different issues, agendas, etc.
2. Online programs are different everywhere – as are the demands, degree of involvement, design, etc., etc.

### **16 – Oct 29**

Boy – I seem to be falling into that old crevasse of acceptance again.

Call it the usual online insecurity, but I have a strong desire to be integrated with the group so as to demonstrate my support, show that I understand the material, and get responses from fellow classmates and the professor.

I feel awkward many times – and a little codependent. Some of that is because the class is online and I hate appearing the fool. This is even more of a problem since, as we've noted in this class and others, the online word has considerably more traction than the spoken word because it can be retrieved more readily.

This is both good and bad with respect to knowledge accountability issues – working for you and against you.

### **17 – Oct 30**

In our online discussion about community characteristics I brought up the situation I ran into with one of my UMUC courses where we broke up into teams and we had a non-participating member.

I keep rereading what I wrote for the topic and wonder if I should have spun it a little different but without sounding too defensive.

Admittedly, our group came to “understand” that our non-respondent was clearly not able to focus on the topic (as we noted in her other posts for the class) and that she seemed confused. I know that our team leader tried contacting her personally to see if she needed some help and that each of us tried to tell her that we could take up the slack, but she didn't even reply to that.

All of this would have potentially gone through the cracks if it weren't for the fact that, as a group, we had to evaluate each person's contribution to the assignment as well as our own. Each of us had been feeling pretty badly that we couldn't get anything from her at the beginning of the project, unfortunately that emotion turned a little ugly when, despite our repeated requests, she gave us material that was not what we agreed upon. We all tried to get her to get us new material, but again she

didn't reply so we had to farm it out amongst the group. She even tried to submit it to us a day late like nothing had happened.

Part of me wondered if that was a test on our group as well – with the professor giving us an “agent” who would disrupt the dynamic and see how we would either pull together or fall apart and how we would perform grading. Just the conspiracy theorist in me I suppose.

As with any community, there are good sides and bad sides. What I see though is that, even though we had problems, community members came together to complete the task.

### **18 – Nov 1**

I have a real problem with studies that use respondents with a bias. I mean, really – how accurate is data if those being tested have preconceived feelings? Put another way, what about questions slanted towards those people who have positive or negative feeling about the subject?

This gets difficult too if you are using emotions as a guiding force for questions. Facts vs. perception of facts – black and white vs. values.

Somehow, we have to consider emotional values in surveys, but that takes a special understanding of tests so that we don't damage them (either through our questions or how we look at data) by putting our own emotional values in them. Otherwise, we no longer seek information so much as support for an argument.

If we are looking for students to be social, we have to ask more open questions and remove our bias. The only exception I can see for that is when an instructor needs to guide a conversation in a certain direction.

### **19 – Nov 2**

Pratt's perspectives of teaching have got me wondering what kind of teacher I would be. I know from a few experiences I've had that I need to be more organized and be ready for special student situations so I can deal with them fairly or direct them to others when necessary.

I remember teaching a one credit elective in college on reading and writing. It was a simple class and I had about 4-6 people I think. One student, however, did not do her work and pleaded with me to give her a passing grade so she would finish school. I didn't feel comfortable doing this, so I consulted with my mentor who then explained to me that I had a responsibility as a teacher and the student had a responsibility to learn – something he felt the student had not exercised if they were only being held back by my one credit course. I did work out a plan with the mentor though so the student could finish the class by performing additional exercises.

That situation and others make me realize that, while I may seek the Nurturing perspective as a teacher, I need to work on not being a jellyfish and letting others take advantage of my supportive nature.

**20 – Nov 4**

With respect to my Nurturing perspective, I tested myself to see how I fare in comparison to the other perspectives.

I found a Web site (<http://teachingperspectives.com>) that asks you 45 questions to help you determine your teaching perspective and then provides grades (values) on how strongly you support each perspective. From what I can determine, questions were perspective-specific with points assigned from one to five based on responses (generally, a range from strong negative to strong positive) and then totaled.

The questions didn't seem appropriate to me in some situations, but I answered as best I could. I also tend to not answer in the extremes but more in the middle (for example, disagree vs. strongly disagree). This means (to me) that my scores may not give a strong lead in terms of my perspective of choice.

The scores broke out like this:

Nurturing	32
Transmission	29
Developmental	28
Apprenticeship	27
Social Reform	23

Nurturing won out as I expected – although I tried not to bias my answers. If I can trust the data, it suggests to me that other teaching perspectives are almost as likely to be exercised.

**21 – Nov 7**

Are we better students if we are better retainers/containers of information? I concede that it is helpful to have information “locally stored” since it makes it easier to apply when learning new ideas or trying to combine concepts and learn outcomes.

I tend to rely on tools rather than my retention of information – this allows me that ability to quickly search for related material. By “tools” I mean the use of simple computer techniques that allow me to quickly find references in online documents, so long as they contain readable text.

Does that make me mentally lazy? That also begs the question regarding what we consider learning and how much is memorization.

I remember when Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson first meet in Conan Doyle's books and how Watson relates the Copernican Theory to Holmes who then replies that “Now that I know it I shall do my best to forget it” (A Study in Scarlet). His remarks afterwards discuss that our minds are like empty attics



that get filled with all sorts of unnecessary information and that we need to regulate what goes in them (at least, that was my take on the piece 30+ years ago).

I wish I had been able to practice that – my mental attic doesn't feel like it can take in new material and the old stuff keeps getting regurgitated.

## **22 – Nov 10**

Not a big “Aha!”, but I'm beginning to analyze what I write and see a little more each time.

In particular this last week I wrote about feeling comfortable in the online community vs. f2f and thinking that others like me benefit from this as well. I see there is a need for many students to communicate who, for whatever reason, didn't want to call attention to themselves in a physical classroom. I would like to work with those people and nurture their abilities and strengthen their confidence.

Hmm – sounds a lot like I'm a preacher on the mound ...

And that doesn't take care of lurkers either...

## **23 – Nov 14**

As much as there are studies and opinions about the differences between online and face-to-face classes, I'm also realizing that (to me) online's strengths actually point out where f2f should have had something in place.

OK – not all online is created equal, nor have I read about “standard operating procedures” for traditional brick and mortar class educational techniques. What I see though in my classes thus far are a lot of caring people defining the best guidelines for teaching students. It feels like it is a teaching that seeks to unify various classes and improve overall learning.

This may be similar in its intent to physical teaching environments, but it doesn't feel as adhered to. Students have a higher potential for disappointment in f2f as a result.

## **24 – Nov 17**

I've been a fan of some sort of “Web Police” concept when it comes to accuracy and other details.

A grading system that has some basics like “cannot be verified” or at the very least “this story has only been corroborated by \_\_\_ number of people first hand” would be useful. I get tired of manufactured facts (politics particularly drives me crazy) or agenda-driven knowledge (i.e., only research that supports a premise is explored – no contradictory info allowed).

Even before I go to a site, I want a warning telling me who or what type of person developed the content. We may be “anonymous” on the Web, but accountability may start squashing that freedom to say whatever we want without comment.

What's that saying again? You have the right to your informed opinion.

## **25 – Nov 19**

Hyperlinked layers of material are the way I like to construct information. Ideally, with three layers so that we have levels where the more informed person only needs to go one layer down while the relative novice goes down to the third level. Someone who is somewhere in between will go to the #2 level.

Ideally, even in an online class, there is redundancy of information for important things like dates and deliverables. I'm curious as to what kind of QA and workflow design work is done for classes that identifies the most important topics that need to be covered.

I wish our readings were all hypertexted – links instead of author names and page numbers, etc. I find the readings a chore to get through because of all the distraction.

## **26 – Nov 24**

Paper's done – had to chop a lot out because I didn't focus my topic the way I wanted to.

Wish I could rewrite it. I certainly didn't practice what every online teacher needs to do: be good at time management. I underestimated what I needed to do in order to call up my references – I needed to create an outline and flesh out what I was going to write at an earlier stage. I had done some of the work, but ran into scheduling problems (and was flat out tired). I can see this affected my proofreading and APA references as well. You'd never know I took a day off from work to write it – good intentions, bad planning.

I need to improve my organizational skills to be an effective educator. This was an important reminder to work on those skills.

## **27 – Nov 30**

### **FINAL ENTRY**

With respect to what is expected in our last entry, here are my responses:

**a. What five adjectives do you feel best describe your participation in this course?**

Interested, confused, questioning, enlightened, pensive – these all seem to happen in various stages and would sometimes loop back into themselves. This made discussions thought-provoking.

**b. What strength(s) do you feel that you brought to this course? How/when was that strength exhibited?**

I like to question, not just to be a smart-aleck, but to try and ask things from another perspective. Maybe that makes me a pain-in-the-neck or seems like I'm trying to take control,

but I'm honestly curious and used my questioning during the course to get an idea as to what other angles there are to a situation.

**c. What area(s) of weakness, if any, did you discover in your own learning?**

Preparedness and its sister, time-management. I mostly had time in the late evenings to read assignments – this is not my best time of the day for overstated reasons.

I also was trying to demonstrate my ability to be an “early responder” to discussions, but that fell flat most of the time.

I felt connected yet distant at some times – my own problem. I felt a little “off” during the course, mostly I think because of my ego – I wanted to stand out and demonstrate knowledge and ability, but I feel that I fell flat during online discussions and on other occasions (unfortunately, when grading was involved). It made me question my ability to contribute and become an effective distance educator.

**d. Describe one thing that you learned about yourself as an online learner through your participation.**

That I need to work at attaining knowledge, organizing effort, and planning appropriately.

Knowledge attainment used to be much easier – academic material is tougher for me to assimilate as well. Organization used to be second nature to me – I need to establish those practices again. Planning is always a problem for me – I have to find some way to address this.