COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION AS A VEHICLE FOR LEARNING: ENGAGING WITH STUDENTS ONLINE

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BACKGROUND

Graduates of a Bachelor of Science will "*be effective communicators of science by ; communicating scientific results, information, or arguments, to a range of audiences, for a range of purposes, and using a variety of modes*". (Yates, Jones, & Kelder, 2011, p. 11). To achieve this outcome requires effective mechanisms for its assessment.

AIMS

The aim of this study was to investigate student perception of a presentation tool used by first year undergraduate science students as part of an online assessment task. This assessment task aimed to develop content knowledge and generic skills by using computer-mediated "…*communication as a vehicle for learning*" (Barrie, 2007, p. 456).

DESIGN AND METHODS

Students used Prezi, a presentation tool, as part of an online assessment task in an introductory chemistry unit. This online modality replaced a face-to-face poster presentation; in the first semester volunteers were recruited, and in second semester all students were compelled to use Prezi. This task formed 10% of the final grade in this unit. Students were requested to construct a 5 to 10 minute Prezi presentation, and a short précis of their approach to this task. Students were provided with a chemical topic and target audience for their presentation, and peers and instructors assessed the outcomes. Student perception of this assessment task was measured with an established instrument (Maor & Fraser, 2005) and the possible effects of student age, gender and mode of study on perception were assessed.

RESULTS

The instrument used to survey students was found to function well, with no significant difference in response patterns between respondents in each semester. In exploring the measurement model, items of interest relating to the ease of use of Prezi emerged, indicating its general utility. Student age had a minor impact on their perception of the ease of use of Prezi, with students over the age of 21 finding the program more complex, challenging and therefore more engaging to use than students 21 years old or younger. Students provided positive feedback on the impact that Prezi had on their approach to the assessment task. There were issues with isolation caused by replacing a group task in a social environment, with an individual task in an online environment.

CONCLUSIONS

Students' positive perceptions on their use of Prezi, regardless of whether they volunteered or were compelled to use the tool, strongly indicated its promise as a vehicle for learning through computer-mediated communication. Further work will focus on the effect Prezi has on student social engagement and motivation, and the role of age in the students perception of the effectiveness of the tool.

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