

Assessment Toolbox Midterm
by Jeanne Norville, Evan Abbey, and Michelle Hill

Introduction

Using a cooperative design method, jigsaw, our team collaborated to put together this document evaluating 3 assessment tools. Among the many valuable assessment tools out there for online educators, we have chosen to outline in this document the benefits, weaknesses, and possible applications of [LiveJournal](#), an online reflection tool, [Exam Builder](#), a quiz/test maker, and [DimDim](#), a peer-to-peer collaboration tool. Whether you are creating a community of learners by blogging, assessing through an online tool, or collaborating through chat, audio, or video, one may find any of these tools to be a viable option for use depending upon your needs and budget.

Assessment Tool: LiveJournal
By Jeanne Norville

Introduction, Uses, and Benefits

[LiveJournal](#) is another blogging site, rated #9 at [TopTenReviews](#). It is a good site for beginning bloggers because all you have to do is register and then start blogging. The site does the rest.

You can set the security level yourself for each individual blog you post. If you want a post to be absolutely private, you can select that option for that particular post. Spellcheck is there keeping the message as clear as possible.

The best feature is the emphasis on community. You can find other journals with the same interests as you. The teacher can create a community and control who is able to post comments, who sees the posts, and who joins the community. This makes it a safer environment for students to share their reflections.

The top of the home page entices you with a question from another blogger every time you sign on. It's called Writer's Block: Unplugged, taking you to a page of thought provoking questions that you can comment on or just read.

Weaknesses & Challenges

As with any free use of blogs, the advertisements are rampant. Using this site for blogging with high school students is not a good idea because of such intrusive advertisements. For instance, on the home page of LiveJournal, there is an ad for an international online dating site.

Although there are beginning bloggers, some may not be new to computers and want more say in how the page looks. Unlike other blogging sites, like WordPress and Edublogs, this site doesn't provide the support for setting up a personalized blog page, except for the various templates. You must know how to code to change anything on your page. Otherwise you are stuck with what they give you.

This blog is not equipped to host e-portfolios because it doesn't have an "upload document" feature, unless it was hidden in plain sight. You can add links, media, and images, but not documents. Perhaps the e-portfolio would have to be completely online based,

Application in an Online Classroom

These applications are general to any online classroom.

Reflections: Students can maintain a weekly reflective journal on their course, reflect on information gathered from the class, or write up their notes taken that they deem the most important information to synthesize.

Tag- team or Jigsaw: Students could do individual investigation of a concept and report on it via a LiveJournal community. Then, another student could contribute another concept to it. This would help develop their confidence to be able to learn a concept via reading and analysis, rather than a teacher's lecture.

Picture or Statement Stimuli: Students can respond to a question the teacher posts to the community page. They could also just respond to a picture. This would be used in order to develop their "gift of gab" skill.

Learning Objective

Course: Online French course for beginners

Audience: High school students

Learning outcome: Students will be able to write about themselves in the target language.

Learning objective: Students will be able to write about their daily routines in the target language.

Assessment: Students will describe the timeline of daily activity over the course of seven days in French.

Technology Tool: Blog service website for online journaling such as [LiveJournal](#).

Conclusion

Although this is a highly rated, free tool, many of the limitations might prevent its use for the high school classroom. The number of advertisements and the themes of the advertisements would not be appropriate for that age group. Requiring knowledge of web page coding and not being able to upload documents would also be a limitation that would be a consideration before using this site.

Assessment Tool: Exam Builder

By Evan Abbey

Introduction, Uses, and Benefits

Exam Builder (<http://www.exambuilder.com>) is an online, hosted testing tool, allowing you to create your own online tests. When students complete the test, the teacher has a variety of different tools to analyze student results, including tools to examine the difficulty of questions.

Exam Builder has two basic templates for two different purposes: certification mode or click-and-learn mode. Certification mode is best described as a “higher-stakes” testing environment, where students are completing questions without feedback and further teaching. The click-and-learn mode, on the other hand, is used in a “pre-testing” or “non-critical assessment”.

With the creation of quizzes, you also have access to the data. Student results from the quizzes are placed in a back-end summary. It is not a fully featured gradebook, but allows you to arrange the results in various ways.

There are a host of other features, including randomization, question pools, flexible grouping of students, scheduling of exams, and a suite of different reports that can be run. One important item is the integration into an LMS. Though it is only briefly mentioned on its website, I was able to take my practice account and load it through the AICC format into a Moodle course. The end result was that when students completed the exam, the scores automatically went into the gradebook. This feature is an important element to look for when examining online test-building software.

In testing out the software, I also liked the “Knowledge Gaps” reporting feature. Though it isn’t described on the website, I had the ability to align my quizzes with certain items (specifically the end outcomes a particular question addressed), and then I could use the “Knowledge Gaps” reporting to see student proficiency on that outcome. I could also slice the data to see if student knowledge varied depending on other variables (such as gender).

Weaknesses & Challenges

One of the chief considerations is the cost; the tool is not free. You can use it for a 30-day free trial, but for 50 students, it is \$650/year. This is quite a consideration given the proliferation of free web 2.0 tools that exist. You are paying for the manage-ability that the software provides.

Another consideration is that the testing module is somewhat limited, and does not represent a very deep level of assessment. Since it is set up to assess the student responses automatically, it supports only multiple choice, multiple select, true/false, fill in the blank, and matching questions.

One of the selling points for the company is that it is quick and easy to set up. This is partially true. It isn’t too difficult, and it is intuitive. However, there are several steps to the process, as even if you don’t use question pools or other advanced features, you still must 1) create a quiz,

2) create the questions, 3) create a class, 4) create each student account, 5) assign the students to a class, 6) assign the quiz to a class, and 7) schedule the quiz.

The contrast to this is to develop a quiz within your learning management system. In Moodle, I have several more options for questions, including cloze, essay, sorting, and ordering. In addition, while I need to create the quiz, create the questions, and then arrange them in the order in the quiz, all the other student registry information is already taken care of. And the most striking difference, your LMS quiz tool will be free.

Application in an Online Classroom

The two different formats help show how this tool could be used in an online course. In one sense, the tool can be used for summative evaluation, for the purposes of eliciting a grade or assuring mastery before moving on in the course. An end-of-unit quiz would be a common use. In a course with a learning objective of understanding different musical terms, a vocabulary quiz at the end of a unit would help assess that understanding.

On the other hand, the tool could easily be used for a pre-test at the beginning of the course. Students who answer questions would receive feedback on their answers to help them understand how the upcoming lesson will address this concept. It can also be used in the middle of the lesson, or in review. For a class with a learning objective of understanding the functions of different body organs, the quiz can give feedback such as "Hint: It is in the digestive system" or "Review this on page 15 of our lesson".

From this sense, it is a basic selected-response assessment instrument, and as selected-response assessments are very common for e-learning, instructors will feel natural using them.

Learning Objective

Course: Anatomy/Physiology

Audience: High School

Learning outcome: Students will demonstrate mastery of the functions by answering a set of selected-response questions over the functions of the body systems correctly

Learning objective: Students will understand functions of the different body systems

Assessment: A quiz will be used with matching, short-answer, and multiple choice questions

Technology Tool: Exam builder will be used to develop a quiz over the functions of the body systems.

Conclusion

This online exam tool had significant advantages including integration to a Learning Management System such as Moodle, scheduling exams, grouping students, and data reporting on the back end among others. The cost of the product would be a significant consideration for any school budget. The limits on types of questions and the multi-step process to create the quiz or test would also be a factor. In contrast, a free LMS such as Moodle would provide you with some of the same benefits, but with more question options.

Assessment Tool: DimDim

By Michelle Hill

Introduction, Uses, and Benefits

DimDim is an online collaboration tool used for holding live sessions or recording sessions with your students. You are able to chat or talk via microphone/web cam, use a white board, share files, and more.

Some of the benefits include that they have a free 10-seat license as well as a free pro-license for 30 days. They do offer education pricing as well. The sign up was very easy with only a small plug-in to install. After sign up, I received both a phone call and a follow up email for my personal account representative who will work with me if I have questions during the trial. There are also helpful videos, demos, and other resources available on the web site.

Features of the program include dial-in or connecting via Internet to the session. Chat, whiteboard, screen share, document share, polls, embedding videos (called a mash up) were some of the highlighted features. Polling of participants was also a great feature and fairly easy to set up. Participants can use microphone or web cams for up to 4-way video chat.

The interface had “myScreen” which had customizable settings and movable parts, which many users would be familiar with from Facebook and other social media applications.

There is an unlimited session time limit, the default being 10 hours. The site claims to be the easiest screen sharing application out there. Overall the product is very competitive with the higher priced competitors with only a few limitations.

Weaknesses & Challenges

Weaknesses for DimDim included the drawing tools. The eraser was not available and finding a way to delete items on the whiteboard was tricky. It had very simple whiteboard tools. The recording option doesn't share the whiteboards, embedded files and polls. This would be a significant challenge for those instructors hoping to use this to tape lectures in advance.

The program had limited supported file types to only Word, Excel, PowerPoint and PDF, whereas competitors have application share for any program. There also was not a way to remote to other's computers for troubleshooting with students.

There were not any group break-out sessions that could be found, note saving, captioning, or graphing calculator in the competitor's versions. Bandwidth was not discussed on the site, but should be looked into for those that have dial up or the Internet lags. Many of the competitors have technology to keep the conversation in real-time for students, even if the connection cuts out. It will catch the student back up to real time by adjusting the speed of the audio.

Application in an online classroom

Examples of application of the tool in an online classroom.

- a. Study sessions
- b. Lectures
- c. Guest speakers
- d. Student presentations
- e. Live quizzes
- f. Professional development training for faculty and staff
- g. Tutoring
- h. Orientation
- i. Focus groups
- j. Virtual office hours

Learning Objective

Course: Online Statistics

Audience: Post-Secondary

Learning outcome: Students will be able to evaluate their final research outcomes.

Learning objective: Understand confidence intervals and perform tests of hypotheses for inferences involving one or two populations.

Assessment: Students will share their research In an online chat session answering analysis and evaluative questions about the process and results.

Technology Tool: Online collaboration and meeting tool, [DimDim](#).

Conclusion

For live collaboration, this tool fits the bill (free). The ease of set up and rich resources available on the web and via the assigned account manager would be helpful for even the most novice of users. If a teacher or student wanted to prepare a recorded session in advance or record a session for later viewing, however, the missing whiteboard and other features would be a real problem. The differences in the free and pro accounts were not that significant. Possible other solutions may be Adobe Connect, Elluminate, and a host of others. Further research and cost/benefit analysis would be needed to see if using a screen capture program in conjunction with this collaboration tool would fit the bill.

Summary

In summary, the 3 tools, Live Journal, Exam Builder, and DimDim do offer many features for online assessment. They have definite potential for online collaboration and communication as well as assessment. All 3 do have significant draw backs including the price tag and/or advertisements in place of a free offer. Possible further research into the competitors products may prove to be beneficial to see if the cost/benefit to each is worth budget.