

**“Tagbilaran City Science High School’s
Extended Classroom and Class Session:
The Online Group”**

A Profile of a Teaching Innovation for
Teaching Computer Education IV

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INTRODUCTION

*"Today, a journey of a thousand discoveries begins with a single click."
Anonymous*

What is an Online Group?

The invention of the Internet and the development of the World Wide Web (WWW) has revolutionized our world from estrange and isolated places to connected communities. Connecting and communicating to other people today is just a "click" away. Getting in touch with one's relatives or finding a long-lost friend is not a difficulty any longer. Technological developments and advances paved communities or the individual to get connected to other people somewhere around the world.

One development that transformed the ways of people to relate, connect and communicate to others so easily is the Electronic Mail. This development made marvels in science of computing. And this has inspired a lot of computer enthusiasts to study and develop further this technology on how they could utilize all the more its powers. One of the great developments these enthusiasts have developed with the use of the "e-mailing technology" was the *Virtual Community* or this is usually called by ordinary computer users as the "*Online Groups*". With the influx of the Web 2.0 trend, these said groups are even more enhanced into a technological tool to give us better features. One major feature added is the element where users or group members are allowed to do more than just retrieve information. They can now create their own profiles, upload files, and control things on the web. Thus, this functionality has stepped up into the popularly known today as the "*Online Social Network*".

These new features changed the face of the World Wide Web from a simple library of resources to an information society hub. Internet users with the same interest create virtual groups to publish or gather authentic individual information. So, *Online Groups* are described as a collection or network of users generally with the same curiosity and using the same web-based services such as mailing lists and Internet forums which provide tools to members in order that they can post messages, e-mail,

interact with each other, upload and share files, broadcast schedules, and create profiles.

These *Online Group* services are the precise learning atmosphere that one should have in a classroom setting. In the classroom, the teacher offers opportunities and situations to students to interact freely, express their thoughts, show and share their outputs. Moreover, the teacher announces in the classroom his instructions and activities related to his subject just like posting messages or broadcasting something in the online group. These are just the similarities between a classroom and the rising online group technology.

The Students of Today...

Numerous studies show that a significant percentage of the world's population spends personal time just to be online (Hupprich and Bumatay, 2002). This is true to teenagers especially in our country. An independent survey proves through a micro-representation that majority of today's students go online every week.

Tagbilaran City Science High School (TCSHS) is the "show window" of the Division of Tagbilaran City, Bohol when it comes to academic excellence. The school is situated at the outskirts of the city. It has an average population of 300 students every year. Seventy percent of the enrolled students come from financially-stable families and a minute group of 2 percent comes from financially-deficient families while the rest of the population is coming from well-off or above-average families.

In the aforementioned survey, the TCSHS students were the respondents. The survey results stated that 76.75% of the student respondents go online every week (Auxtero et al., 2007). Fifty (50) percent of which just go online for personal or private reasons or this means they use the Internet even without a given school work to do with it. This shows that no matter what the economic status of the student, the urge to get updated and be visible online is a notable daily-life activity of today's student. Moreover, the survey gathered a convincing data which resulted to a conclusion that most of the students' activities online were related to social networking functionalities. The

researchers stated that 3 out the top 5 favorite sites of the respondents where social networking sites, namely: Friendster, YouTube, and Photobucket. Furthermore, today's students are learning much through media and the Information Highway. We can spot concrete evidences of this statement from the students' influences and through the way they talk, through the contents of their stories, their fashion sense, lifestyles and even their mentality.

With the obvious availability of an online computer through the visible presence of Internet Cafés in almost all the key places in the country, there is no doubt that the above-mentioned scenario is not true. The easy access of the Web and the Internet motivates everyone to spend ample time to get and be online. These outcomes can represent, most likely, the same trend for the rest of the country's secondary schools. And with these facts, the education sector and its authorities must take another road to utilize and convert our student's "online-time" into another additional learning opportunity.

THE INNOVATION PROFILE

The Big Idea to Innovate

Recognizing the power of the present available Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools such as the *Online Groups* and the preferences of our students today, the idea to shift from the conformist way of teaching to something innovative came as a primary need, especially, when handling technology-based subjects. Besides, the move to integrate, as much as possible, ICT in Education is currently the spotlight of both the Department of Education and the other prime movers of education.

Thus, here buds the **big idea** to employ the Online Group technology and functionalities in teaching and administering the Computer Education subject of the fourth year students at Tagbilaran City Science High School. This idea transformed the learning environment of the Computer Education class from a limited area of the computer room into “*boundless place of learning – the class online group*”, from the average one hour class duration into “*unending and continuous learning opportunities*”, and from 4 to 5 days meeting a week into “*24/7 open connection*”. We humbly titled this innovative idea as our “**Tagbilaran City Science High School’s Extended Classroom and Class Sessions: The Online Group**”.

This paper narrates the “success story” of Sci Hi’s “Computer Education Online Group” as an extension of the classroom and class sessions. It characterizes the experience of **soaring the unbounded opportunities to educate the school’s students by tapping the limitless capacity of ICT**.

Why Innovate?

Tagbilaran City Science High School envisions its students to be technologically-competitive and excellent. The school continuously adjusts its learning strategies to meet and cater the needs of its students. And one of the institution’s efforts to mold the students to excellence is the integration of new learning approaches and ICT in teaching the subjects so as to provide appropriate and effective learning environments.

The Objectives:

This teaching innovation and strategy intends to brace the instruction of Computer Education and intensify the students' learning.

Specifically, the strategy aimed to:

1. Extend students' learning experiences and opportunities,
2. Enriching teacher-learner and learner-to-learner interactions,
3. Promote ICT utilization and exposure,
4. Provide unending connection and assistance to students,
5. Implement easy management of the learning activities.

It is believably true and sensible to say that ***“the more you expose your students to learn, the more they will get to learn further”***. This is the core basis and principle of this innovation. It is expected that practicing such learning strategy in Computer Education would intensify the student's learning, performance and achievement.

Extending Students' Learning Experiences and Opportunities

This specific objective refers to the capacity of the Online Group to give students opportunities to learn even beyond the mandated time allotment for the subject and, outside the premises of the school.

In fact with the integration of ICT in the fourth year Computer Education class of TCSHS, we can now say that ***“there is no such thing as a four-walled classroom”***. The students can, then, learn any thing - anytime and anywhere through their personal sessions in the online group.

Enriching Teacher-Learner and Learner-to-Learner Interactions

In this goal, the integrated Online Group of the Computer Education class allows open line connection and opportunities for students to freely interact with their teacher and peers. The functionalities of Online Groups, such as, posting messages and threading them create this “open interaction opportunity” between members.

Promote ICT Utilization and Exposure

Since the subject involved in this story is Computer Education, there is really an obligation to fully integrate and use ICT. Furthermore, the need for students to be exposed to computer-related technologies is part and parcel of the Computer Education curriculum.

By utilizing the Online Group of the class to announce, upload, connect, link, discuss, display and archive Comp. Ed. instructional materials, the students are pushed to get online from time to time and get exposed to the new technological advances related to computing.

Providing Unending Connection and Assistance to Students

The Online Group functions as the link for both the teacher and the students. Since this link utilized the Internet and the WWW, it operates 24/7. This creates the unending connection between the teacher and the students. With this functionality, assistance to students is open anytime and anywhere. This particular capability of the online group cannot be matched by the classroom setting.

Implement Easy Management of the Learning Activities

A unique function of an Online Group is the mailing list. Any member of the group can freely post or send public or private messages to any member. These messages can attach documents and files. Moreover, these attached files can be uploaded in the online group site and then downloaded for the members who avail. Furthermore, these files can be organized into several folders or in the archives. This illustrates how management of outputs can easily be handled by the teacher or the moderator of the online group.

In addition, posting the learning activities or instructions and then announcing them to everyone is easier than writing or posting them on the chalkboard. The percentage that everyone can read your announced activity is greater provided your students regularly “sign in” in your extended classroom – the Online Group.

The Class:

This teaching innovation and strategy has been implemented for the duration of two-years now to the fourth year Computer Education students at Tagbilaran City Science High School.

For this second year of implementation (S.Y. 2008-2009), there are 96 active student-members of the online group. These students belong from the three different sections of the fourth year level with an average of 32 students per section.

The gender distribution of the students per section is more or less equal. In other words, the difference in number is comparably insignificant. There are as many males as the females in each section. Moreover, the sectioning of the students at TCSHS is heterogeneous.

The Learning Styles:

In this teaching intervention, the focused learning styles were *visual* and *kinesthetic*. In most of the activities done with the Online Group, the learning experiences provided to the students require seeing and looking for them to learn more. In the same manner, many of these activities go with tasks that require students to manually and personally perform or do the assigned tasks.

The display of outputs through the online group depicts a concrete example of the visual learning style emphasized in this intervention. On the other hand, one of the main goals of this teaching strategy is to expose students to continuously use the computer and its advances. This goal manifests the kinesthetic learning style anticipated in this teaching innovation.

The Cognitive Abilities:

In this innovation, Deductive, Inductive and Analogical reasoning are required. All three skills are applicable especially in building the concepts of Computer Education.

Moreover, Bodily-Kinesthetic, Interpersonal, Verbal, Logical-Mathematical, and Visual-Spatial Intelligences are the other core cognitive abilities touched in this innovation.

The Duration of the Teaching Innovation:

The created Online Group as an integrated instructional innovation in teaching Computer Education spans throughout the **entire school year or for ten (10) months**. The student members are expected to actively utilize the Online Group for scholastic activities such as submitting assignments and outputs, group discussions, and other learning activities. Moreover, regular teaching-learning activities will be conducted through the Online Group throughout the year.

How to Innovate?

Ideas remain as ideas unless they are put into action.

To think of a strategy is a simple thing to do but implementing it is the hardest part. The following part describes the implementing procedures of the so-called extended classroom and class session – the Online Group.

The Requirements:

This teaching innovation requires the following hardware, software and other operational requirements:

1. Computer Unit(s)
2. Internet Connection
3. Internet Browser
4. Free Online Group Services, specifically, Yahoo! Groups
5. Free Web-based E-mail Services, specifically, Yahoo! Mail
6. Class Online Group Account (Yahoo! Group Account)
7. Individual E-mail Accounts (Yahoo! Mail Account)
8. Online Group Membership
9. Learning Activities, such as WebQuests, Scavenger Hunt, Group Discussions, Online Polls, E-Portfolio, Assignments, Research Activities and Web Links

The Implementing Procedures:

To create and apply this extended classroom and class session teaching innovation, here are the specific procedures:

1. Create individual e-mail accounts.
2. Create the online group for the class.
3. Join in the online group as either a member or moderator.
4. Approve students' membership to the online group.
5. Test the online group.
6. Conduct the different learning activities of the subject through the online group.
7. Sustain the online group.

Creating the Individual E-mail Accounts

This procedure requires all the students to create personal e-mail accounts. An e-mail account is a basic requirement to become a member of an online group. It is recommended to create e-mail accounts using the same web-based service or application with the created online group.

Creating the Online Group for the Class

After creating the individual e-mail accounts, create the online group account using the teacher's e-mail account. By doing so, the Online Group will be owned and moderated by the teacher.

This account will serve as the tool for extended classroom of the Computer Education subject of the fourth year high school students.

Joining the Online Group as Either a Member or Moderator

This procedure refers to the step where students will be applying and joining as members of the created online group off the Computer Education subject. The technical procedures in joining the group are available in the web-based application used.

Approving Students' Membership to the Online Group

This step refers to the technical procedure wherein the group owner accepts or approves the application of the students to join the group as members.

Testing the Online Group

In this step the created Online Group with the approved members will be tested by sending messages or posting a message on the Online Group.

Conducting the Learning Activities Through the Online Group

This is the part of the teaching intervention where some of the learning activities of the Computer Education subject will be done through the created Online Group. Thus, the limited classroom and allotted time for the class sessions is extended to boundless area and limitless span of time.

Sustaining the Online Group

This procedure in the teaching innovation refers to the continuous maintenance and monitoring of the activities done through the Online Groups. This is the part where updating of files and the e-portfolio, membership, monitoring of the group discussion, organization of links as web resources, scheduling of activities, creating new polls and archiving of messages are done.

What are the Key Learning Activities of this Innovation?

The Online Group is just a tool used to extend the classroom setting beyond its four-walls and to lengthen the time of interaction or connection between the teacher and students to an unending or open session. But the essence of this innovation lies on how this technological tool perfectly handles the different learning activities for the students.

The following are the key learning features of this innovation:

1. E-Portfolio
2. Web Links / Web Resource Library
3. Online Polls

4. Message and Discussion Boards
5. Database
6. Assignment and Project Hub
7. Group Work
8. Scavenger Hunt
9. WebQuest
10. Online Research

E-Portfolio

This learning activity refers to the Online Group functionality where files and documents can be uploaded in the Online Group site for members to avail. In this activity, the teacher-moderator of the Online Group can upload outstanding outputs of the student-members for recognition and display. Moreover, the student members can download and view the displayed portfolio for reference and clarity of concepts.

The implementing procedures to do this activity begin with

- (1.) the online submission of the students' outputs;
- (2.) the teacher-moderator selects the best outputs and uploads them in the Online Group site;
- (3.) notices through e-mail messages are sent to all members to announce and remind them to view and learn from the displayed outputs;
- (4.) and then, discussions and comments are freely accepted to clarify computer concepts incorporated in the outputs.

With this activity, the students are expected to clarify confusions and acquired knowledge through the collection of outputs displayed called E-Portfolio.

Web Links / Web Resource Library

This learning activity refers to the capability of the Online Group service to accept recommended links or web sources. All the members of the group have the capability to add links of their favorite sites in the Group site if allowed by the moderator.

The implementing procedures of this activity are as follows:

- (1.) all student members of the group are tasked to look for related web sites on the topics tackled and evaluate the worth and usefulness of the found web site using the formulated criteria;
- (2.) after evaluating the related sites, the recommended sites are then added to the group links as part of the library of web resources;
- (3.) then, notices are sent through the mailing list of the Online Group to remind all the members to use the collection of web links for reference purposes.

With this unique and powerful learning activity, the students have the valuable sources at their fingertips to learn more about the subject matter in Computer Education IV. As a result, the knowledge of the students acquired in the classroom setting can be supported and confirmed by them through the readings they can have out from the collection of web links.

Online Polls

The Poll functionality of the Online Group allows the teacher-moderator to create polls or surveys for the student-members. This interactive service of the online group could be a new approach that a teacher-moderator can use to get feedbacks from students or to evaluate their learning.

The following are the implementing procedures of this learning activity:

- (1.) the teacher-moderator thinks of a related issue or questions to ask;
- (2.) create and post these issues or questions in the Online Group site for the students to answer within a given period of time;
- (3.) at the end of the given period, results are displayed on the group site for the members to avail.
- (4.) then, group discussions and comments are accepted to establish clarity of computer concepts involved in the posted poll.

With this learning activity, the students get to discover their consolidated thoughts on the polls. And they are expected to learn something new out from this activity.

Message and Discussion Boards

The message and discussion boards are one of the primary functions of an Online Group. In this functionality, the members can send and post messages using their e-mail accounts. They can start any discussion and then interact with each other together with the teacher-moderator of the Online Group.

In this learning activity, interpersonal relationships are required. Through this activity, learning is built through the synthesis of ideas shared by the members and the teacher.

The implementing procedures of this learning activity are as follows:

- (1.) any group member can post his/her message, issue, question or thoughts regarding the a specific topic in Computer Education;
- (2.) after the topics of discussion are posted in the Online Group, the members are free to thread comments and ideas related to the topics to build up the discussion;
- (3.) at the end of the discussion, realizations are expected from the participating members with the guidance of the teacher-moderator.

This activity surely builds strong computer concepts. Peer coaching and interaction helps the student to verify their knowledge and skills. This is an activity where learning is at its best.

Database

In this learning activity, the students are able to access a collection of information organized by the moderator using the database functionality of the Online Group. The teacher-moderator can create a table of information such as FAQ's, glossary, database of assignments/outputs and more.

The implementing procedures are the following:

- (1.) the database or collections of related and important information are created by the moderator;
- (2.) notices are then sent to all the members to announce that a database of related information is available in the Online Group.

This learning activity is a new approach especially in sharing established computer concepts and information to the students. The posted databases are expected to help students learn more about Computer Education. With this functionality, first hand and organized information are made available to the students.

Assignment and Project Hub

This learning activity utilizes the Online Group as center for the assigned activities and projects in Computer Education. In this activity, the students receive supporting tasks in the form of assignments and projects. Through this tasks, students can have regular hands-on and opportunities to learn more by doing.

Here are the implementing procedures of this learning activity:

- (1.) plan a series of tasks to assign as a home work or project to supplement learning of students;
- (2.) post this tasks through the Online Group within a given period of time;
- (3.) send an e-mail messages as notices to the student-members to announce and remind them of the tasks;
- (4.) require the students to submit softcopies of their outputs through the online group and hardcopies for the partial completion of the requirements in Computer Education.

With this learning activity, the learning of computer concepts is supplemented with hands-on performance of students on the involved concepts. This activity offers confirmation of concepts, acquisition of skills and personal experience on actual tasks. The students are expected in this activity to acquire authentic learning.

The other learning activities are common activities encountered in most teaching strategies. They are likewise used to enhance student learning. Here, they are not elaborated because the focus of this paper is just to cite the exceptional learning activities that Online Groups can support well.

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In teaching, the means are as important as the end.

The Online Group teaching innovation developed and integrated in the Computer Education subject at TCSHS is in itself a powerful tool to intensify the teaching and learning the concepts of Computer Education IV. With the capabilities not found in the ordinary learning environment, learning is built through a solid foundation. Students are given more opportunities to learn more concepts and skills in computing. Moreover, this teaching strategy transformed the usual face of the school and schooling.

On the part of the teachers, this strategy could help them greatly in the administration of the learning activities and in the management of the class. It eases out the monitoring of students performance and the gap between teacher and students. In addition, the innovation is the appropriate ICT integration one can consider in teaching Computer Education or other technology-based subjects.

Moreover, it depicts the outcome of **soaring the boundless opportunities when tapping the limitless capacity of ICT.**

What Worked and Didn't Work?

This innovation allows the students to control the learning process in a way that they can individualize their learning experience through the utilization of the different tools such the e-mail, message boards, threaded discussion, e-portfolio, e-polls and database.

The following are the things that **worked** in this innovation:

1. Indeed, the four-walled classroom and the limited time of a class session are extended to continuous opportunities. The Online Group is available to both the student-members and the teacher-moderator anytime and anywhere as long as there is an online computer.

2. The handling of the different learning activities is administered and managed with ease by the teacher. The various functionalities and capabilities of the Online Group conform to the requirements of the learning activities.
3. The learning outcomes expected from the students are acquired through the new environment offered by the Online Group.
4. The interactions between the teacher and the students, likewise, between a student and his co-students are enriched through the opportunities that the Online Group was able to offer. The indirect personal presence one can have in the Online Group encourages the members to freely express themselves in the discussions and actively participate in the learning activities.
5. Through the use of the technological advances such as the Online Group in the conduct of the learning activities, the students are all the more inspired and encouraged to use the computer and acquire the desired skills.

We cannot really deny that in everything there are always two sides – the positive and negative sides. Despite the numerous positive points or advantages that this innovation gives us, there are also things that didn't work well.

The following are the things that **didn't work** with use of the Online Group:

1. A few numbers of students find this innovation a problem due to financial constraints. Even if a great percentage of the TCSHS students go online every week, there are some students who find difficulty to get online due to lack of funds for the hour fees of an online computer in an Internet Café. It is noted in the student demographics that not all have computers at home with an Internet connection.
2. With the given freedom to access the extended classroom and attend the online class sessions anytime and anywhere, a noticeable number of students fail to update themselves regularly on the activities of the

subject by checking their e-mails and signing in the Online Group. This failure affects the desired outcome of the innovation.

3. Since the teaching innovation and strategy is web-dependent, there are few instances that schedules and activities are not met. Moreover, the innovation is vulnerable to technical problems.

What are the Recommended Improvements of the Teaching Innovation?

There is no such thing as a perfect teaching approach. It basically depends on how the teacher evaluates his class and identifies the students' needs.

For this Online Group teaching innovation, there are parts that require improvement. As far as the two-year-experience of implementation of the Online Group is concern, here are the following parts that one can improve:

1. Find a more powerful web-based online service other than the popular Yahoo! Groups.
2. Plan and apply a better system to control the group members' capabilities to control the Online Group features and account.
3. Use faster internet connection and high-end computer.
4. Schedule the year-round learning activities to be administered in the Online Group.
5. Tie up with other related or similar groups on-line.
6. Monitor daily the activities of the Online Group.

These improvements don't mean that this teaching innovation is not good enough. However, to improve one self is really a need especially in this continuously changing world.

Finally, it should be emphasized that the transformation of the classroom does not depend on the technology used. Online Groups alone does not improve desired learning outcomes. The integration of ICT should be within the outline of using appropriate didactic approaches. This paper has shown that the use of an Online Group as a tool to handle the different learning activities generated more success to intensify the students' learning.

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