Learning by Reflection Through
PICCLE: A Forum for International Discussion
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Abstract
What is the main goal of academic programs? The conventional answer is the acquisition of knowledge, the reading of books and other materials, and the learning of facts. Perhaps because there are so many books and the branches of knowledge in which we can learn facts are so multitudinous today, we begin to hear more frequently that the function of academic programs is to give learners a desire to learn and to teach them how to use their minds and where to go to acquire facts when their curiosity is aroused. This cannot be achieved unless necessary opportunities are provided to give learners the chance to be involved in the process of learning while making the task as easy and as enjoyable as possible. This purpose is pursued by the present article. PICCLE is introduced as a forum for international discussions to involve learners in receiving and reflecting on various opinions and cultural viewpoints and to help them increase intercultural understanding of how culture, communication, and identity shape each other and are impacted by language, media, technology, and literacy.

Keywords: language learning, reflection in learning, learning through discussion, course design on the internet

Learning is both an active and reflective process. Though we learn by doing, constructing, building, talking, and writing, we also learn by thinking about events, activities and experiences. This confluence of experiences (action) and thought (reflection) combines to create new knowledge. Both action and reflection are essential ingredients in the construction of knowledge. Indeed it is difficult to extricate one from the other since we are often “parallel processing” reflecting upon activities even as we are in the midst of doing or experiencing them (Caine and Caine, 1991). Because learning is so often subconscious, we do not realize we’ve actually gained new knowledge or understanding until we stop to contemplate a particular activity. Reflection then is the vehicle for critical analysis, problem-solving, synthesis of opposing ideas, evaluation, identifying patterns and creating meaning — in short, many of the higher order thinking skills that we strive to foster in our students. Without reflection, learning ends "well short of the re-organization of thinking that 'deep' learning requires" (Ewell; 1997, p.9).

Reflection does not mean that we sit lotus position, hypnotically humming meditative chants. Reflection can be active and multi-modal. Opportunities for reflection should occur before, during and after activities. That way students can take note of their learning starting point, assess
their progress in the midst of the unit and critically evaluate their own learning at the end of the activity. A key to helping students reflect and make meaning of their learning is creating an appropriate environment to make them feel comfortable sharing their views honestly and openly (reflection rather than recitation). They must feel that their opinions are valued and will not be ridiculed or minimized. In essence, it must be tried to create an atmosphere based on trust and respect to act as a co-learner with the student. Educational research also speaks of the need to establish “active and passive” space—places where students can reflect and retreat from others to work quietly and intrapersonally, as well as places for active engagement and interpersonal learning.

PICCLE forum is hoped to create such an environment. It provides an electronic space for the discussion of texts and media with international student partners. Global teachers can create a PICCLE Forum for their students and invite other teachers to join their Forum to discuss particular materials. Texts and media not available at each location, can be digitized and uploaded to the Forum for sharing.

PICCLE is actually designed as a user-friendly courseware with necessary security and easy maintenance. It stands for a “Pedagogy for InterCultural Critical Literacy Education.” PICCLE Forums support thinking about the ways that cultural background shape the reading/viewing of texts and media. When students discuss interpretations in a Forum, they encounter different opinions and cultural viewpoints, form global communities through online communication, and develop new ideas about themselves, others, and the world. By reflecting on ideas from intercultural perspectives, PICCLE Forums hope to increase critical thinking about cultural meanings and values.

PICCLE stands for the following ideas. P stands for PEDAGOGY implying communication of an idea. I used for INTER-CULTURAL exploring how different cultural viewpoints form ideas differently. C represents CRITICAL implying the values and beliefs that support multiple meanings for symbols. L concerns LITERACY meaning the use of symbols and language to systematically shape ideas. E stands for EDUCATION implying negotiation of values and beliefs to share meaning for an idea.

**Basic Concept of PickleForum**

PickleForum is designed as a forum for discussion of supplied media. Teachers can create their own courses, assign topics for discussion, develops assignments while having control over their individual courses and the topics discussed within them. PickleForum enables the students to have chats, upload files, define cultural specific words, participate in polls, and listen to music. Even students have the opportunity to interact with teachers and students from across the globe.
The basic uses of PiccleForum are considered the sign in, sign up, and join forums. The following instructions help students sign up and use the courses developed by their own or other teachers.

**Sign Up:**

To sign up follow these directions:

1. Go to the front page of PiccleForum at [http://piccle.ed.psu.edu/moodle/](http://piccle.ed.psu.edu/moodle/)

2. Click the “Login” link at the top right of the page

![Figure 1-1](image_url)
3. This will bring you to a page that has a “Sign Up” button

4. Once you click on the sign up button, you are taken to a form

5. This form creates your account and sends you an e-mail to activate it

You won’t be allowed to do anything if you’re not activated, so get the e-mail and hit the link. When you are activated, you have to sign in at the PiccleForum homepage.
Sign In:

To sign in:

1. Go to the front page of PiccleForum at http://piccle.ed.psu.edu/moodle/
2. Click the “Login” link at the top right of the page
3. Fill out your username and password
4. Click Sign in and you are signed in!

The first thing to do once you have signed in is to edit your profile. This gives people an idea of who you are. The next step is to join a course.
Join A Course:

Joining a course will be the easiest thing the teacher tells you to do this year! You’ll need to be signed in, know which course to join, and know an enrollment key. You teacher designates the enrollment key and it could be communicated in the information on the course, which is a little “i” button next to the courses name, or through other means. Once you know all that follow these directions:

1. Search PiccleForum for your course from the

![Figure 3-1](image)

2. When you find your course, click the course name.

![Figure 3-2](image)

3. This displays a screen for you to enter your enrollment key.
1. Once entered, click the login button and join the course.

Now that you have joined a course, your main page will always display the courses you are enrolled in until the course is over or you have unenrolled. You are done, now you can begin to enjoy learning!

The teacher can set up activities for the students to do in individual courses. In this case there are two ways to participate. One is by clicking the activity on the course page, or by clicking the category of activity in the left pane of the course page. Depending on the activity, it will be sorted into its appropriate activity category. One can see all the assigned activities for each category this way.

Assignment:

To open an assignment, click onto the link. The link includes a picture with a hand holding a paper (Figure 4.1). When you receive an assignment, it simply shows you a due date and a paragraph of information on what to do. It can also include a button to choose and a button to upload a file. Follow directions the teachers give for the assignment and you should have no problems.
Chat:

When a teacher assigns a chat, they decide when to start the chat. The chat picture is a cartoon word balloon and is followed by the name of the chat (Figure 5.1). Once you have clicked on the chat, it shows a paragraph on what the chat is about and a link to enter it. Clicking on the link displays a new window with a listing of all participants and chat text. Once you are done, simply close the window that is open and continue on.

Choice:

Responding to a choice is super easy. Click on the choice link, which might also be called something else, but will always have a question mark next to it (Figure 6.1). Once it’s loaded, you will see the question and the choices underneath. After reading the question and the answers, choose an answer by clicking the little bubble next to it. Once the bubble is highlighted, hit the “save my choice” button. The answers are tallied and either shown to the class or not.

Figure 4.2

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Figure 6.2
Forum:

A forum is a virtual message board. You can post a message, have people reply to it, and reply to others messages. A forum is a good place to post questions and comments. Remember, only post what the forums about. So if your teacher creates a forum for discussing religion, post religion comments.

Forums have icons with two faces (Figure 7.1). To add a post, or discussion, click into the forum you with to discuss. Once inside there is a link to “Add a new discussion topic…” which will allow you to post your message.

![For Tutorial forum](image)

Add a new discussion topic…
(There are no discussion topics yet in this forum)

You are logged in as **Student Name (Logout)**
CT1D1

Click this link and enter your new post options. From here you can create the subject, the message, as well as a few other options.

Choose your subject and your message, writing it in advance to post is suggested, and write them in the supplied fields. The options that follow are formatting, subscribing, and attaching. Formatting allows you to write regular text, HTML text, Wiki format, or Moodle auto-format. The regular text or Moodle auto-format would be good for average users. Advanced users might want to use the HTML or Wiki format. HTML is hypertext markup language. It is used for ninety-nine percent of the Internet. Wiki is server software used to freely create and edit Web page content. Subscription choices are as follows; send all replies to your post to you, or send none of the replies from your post to you. This allows you to automatically know when people reply with an e-mail to your account. An attachment will allow you to upload a file for review or for fun. It can be anything as long as it does not exceed the set size.
Once your done, read what you have written, and hit your submit button. You should have 5 minutes from that time to edit your post. After that it is permanent so write carefully. Forums can be one of the best places to learn another person’s opinion, so enjoy the opportunity.

Glossary:

A glossary is a list of words defined by you! Any word not in Moodle’s dictionary can be added with a simple window. When the teacher allows you to add definitions, a glossary will be added. Click the Glossary, which has an open book picture next to it (Figure 8.1). From this window you can add a new entry or browse the entries. You can browse entries by category, date, author, or the index of letter.
Adding an entry is easy. First determine the word and the alternate words that mean the same thing. Then write a definition in any of the supplied formats. Add an attachment if you wish, and hit “Save Changes”. That's it; your definition is saved for everyone to see.

**Resource:**

Resources are files uploaded by the teacher. These files will have some benefit to your course experience. To take advantage of the resource, you must click the link. The resource link has a paper next to it (Figure 9.1). Once you see the page, the next step is reading what resource is given. There are many resources that can be assigned so no specific photos will be shown.

A resource could be a text file, a music file, or a movie file. Text and music files will need no extra software to enjoy, but the movie might. Movies use different formats that require different software. For Quick Time, files will have a .mov, for Real, files will have an .rmp, and for Windows Media Player, the file will have a .wmp. Once you have downloaded or loaded your media, you can begin to enjoy.

**How to Create Courses:**

The beginning objective for a new teacher is to sign-up. This must be done by filling out two forms. The first form is on the teachers page. The second one is on PiccleForum under New Account. After completing both forms, you will be granted teaching privilege within 24 hours. This means that you are given the permission to sign in as a course creator. To test for privilege, go to the PiccleForum, log-in, and look for an “Administration” box with the “Courses” Link. If you have this link, you have the privilege to “Add a new course”. The next few pages will explain how to create a Forum.
How To Create A Forum:

Click the link in the Courses menu “Add New Course”. It will be at the absolute bottom of the page. When creating a new forum there are many settings to choose. Most are pure preference, others can change the look and feel of your forum. We will concentrate on the main choices, if you have questions on other choices, click the help button next to its name. The first settings are Public Information.

Forum formats 1:

“Category” will place the course within an appropriate age group.

“Full Name” appears on the main page. It should be the forum’s name.

“Short Name” must be unique. Use the first letter of each word in the “Full Name” as well as a number trailing them.

“Summary” is description of what the forum will accomplish. Write to the readers and be as detailed as possible. These settings are important, Take care when setting them.

“Format” will change the look and behavior of the forum. Weekly format is not suggested. Topics format is good.

Weekly format is organized week by week, with a clear start date and a finish date. Each week consists of activities. Some of them, like journals, may have "open windows" of, say, two weeks after which they become unavailable.

Topics format is very similar to the weekly format, except that each "week" is called a topic. A "topic" is not restricted to any time limit. It is not necessary to specify any dates.

Social format is oriented around one main forum, the Social forum, which appears listed on the main page. It is useful for situations that are more freeform. They may not even be courses. For example, it could be used as a departmental notice board.

Forum formats 3:

Depending on which forum format is chosen, theses settings mean different things. The “Course start date” should be changed if the weekly format was used, otherwise it will not change any behavior. The “Number of weeks/topics” setting is only used by the 'weekly' and 'topics' course formats.

In the 'weekly' format, the box specifies the number of weeks that the course will run for, starting from the course starting date.
In the 'topics' format, the box specifies the number of topics in the course.

Forum formats 4:

“Group Mode” is a setting that does NOT need to be changed. There should be “no groups” as the default.

Forum formats 5:

The “Availability” option allows you to define who is allowed in your forum. This can be set to “allow” or “not allow” students.

The “Enrolment key” is the password used to join the forum. This is an important field to remember. The “Enrolment key” will be given to all who want to join the forum.

The “Guest Access” will allow the creator to set either Not Allow, or Allow Without “enrollment key”, or Allow With “enrolment key”. It is suggested to Not allow guests.

Forum formats 6:

“Hidden Sections” allows the creator to decide how the hidden sections in the course are displayed to students. It is suggested to be set to “Hidden sections are completely invisible.”

Forum formats 7:

The “News items to show” setting determines how many recent items appear on the course home page, in a news box down the right-hand side. If you set it to "0 news items" then the news box will not even appear.

The “Show Grades” setting allows a teacher to determine if s/he wants the students to see their own grades. This is suggested to be “No”

The “Show Activity Reports”, when set to yes, is available for each participant and will show his/her activity as well as listings of his/her contributions to the current course.

Forum formats 8:

The last setting in forum creation is “Force Language”. This allows the creator to force the used language on a course. To force language is not suggested.

Forum activities:

Now that your forum has been added. The next step is to add activities. Activities are used to assign assignments, forums, chats, choices, etc…
To add an activity or change an activity, the creator must turn editing on. This is done in the top of the forum. Clicking the “Turn Editing On” button when editing is turned on, a number of new symbols appears. Each of the symbols is a button that controls an activity.

Now that there is a blank forum, the creator can begin to mold it into his/her own. To do this, activities are added. They are added by clicking the “Add…” menu inside the forum’s middle column. There are many activities choices to add, but we will concentrate on Forum and Resource.

Adding a forum:

After selecting the “Forum” in the “Add…” menu, PiccleForum will move to “Adding a New Forum” page. This page has a few settings that determine how the Forum works.

The first forum setting is the “Forum Name”. This is shown on PiccleForum’s first page with the “Forum introduction”, which is a description the forum’s topic or goal. A single simple discussion is just a single topic that is useful for short, focused discussions on one page.

Standard forum for general use is an open forum where any one can start a new topic at any time. This is the best general-purpose forum.

Each person can post exactly one new discussion topic (everyone can reply to them though). This is useful when you want each student to start a discussion about, say, their reflections on the week’s topic, and everyone else responds to these.

The next setting is “Can a student post to this forum?” This setting should be set to “Discussions and replies are allowed” if the creator chooses to allow students to create a new post.

The second option, “No discussions, but replies are allowed”, will allow the student to reply to a created post. This is useful when the creator would like to start a discussion and only let students reply to the teachers post.

The last option, “No discussions, no replies” will only let the student read the posts, not create their own.

The “Force everyone to be subscribed” is used when the creator would like to require students to receive new posts in their e-mail. Otherwise, students can choose if they want to receive new posts in their e-mail.

The next setting is “Maximum attachment size”, which does not allow uploads of files bigger than the setting. The maximum is 20MB, which is large enough for a movie, and the minimum is zero, which will keep anyone from uploading a file.

The last setting is “Allow posts to be rated?”, which has a lot of settings that are not necessary for a forum. Finally, the changes should be saved. The following figure shows a created forum.
Conclusion

PickleForum is an electronic interface that promotes communication of ideas between students. It can be used for both creating and using courses. A number of activities can also be put on the website that help students practice required materials.
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