Using blog assignments to encourage students to connect in-class science learning with their out-of-class personal lives

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Blogging assignments are an increasingly popular way of using technology to aid in teaching and increase student learning. If used correctly, blogs require each student to voice their opinion and give the instructor a glimpse of student understanding and interest on a topic. Strategic blog assignments encourage students to engage in course material and have discussions on course topics even when they are out of class. We are curious what kinds of blog assignments increase student discourse in a blog? In addition, we want to know if one can see evidence of student learning within these blog posts and what might this evidence look like? For a Brain and Behavior class taught at UW Bothell, students engaged with one another using an online blog that allowed students to make their own posts as well as reply to their fellow colleagues. Giving and receiving feedback from peers on a blog mimics a social online setting that many students are comfortable with. In addition, the blog provides a forum for students to link ideas from their personal lives to the concepts discussed in class. In this poster, we will report our findings as we categorized the various blog posts. We will share how different blog assignments influence the type and quality of blog discourse. Finally, we will illustrate how blogging provides an arena where students make connections between their everyday lives and the course topics, and how these connections are uncovered and possibly strengthened by the blog environment.

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