Using Prezi in the Classroom

Prezi is an online Adobe Flash-based presentation program. It differs from traditional presentation programs like Microsoft PowerPoint and Apple Keynote in that it is not based on slides. Instead, Prezi presentations exist on a canvas. The presentation is navigated by zooming in and out of different points on the canvas, as needed by the presenter.

There is potential for Prezi use in classrooms to be expanded, but as it is with any new technology, adoption will occur with a few before the majority is typically willing to adopt (Rogers, 2003). Gary Moore spoke of having the courage to try new things in his Blue Ribbon address at the NACTA Conference in Edmonton. The authors of this article have all used Prezi as an instructional tool and are offering advice to instructors who may be interested in mustering up the courage to try Prezi. First, the pros and cons of Prezi will be discussed. Then, suggested guidelines will be presented.

Pros

Prezi allows the creation of linear and nonlinear presentations. Designers have the option of creating a path that creates a linear presentation or can click on different objects in the presentation for a nonlinear presentation. By changing the sizes and positions of objects, designers can visually illustrate the relationship between concepts in the presentation to aid in student understanding of the pieces as well as the whole. Prezi also offers the ability for students to collaborate in class when using the program online. Up to eight people can edit the Prezi at the same time. For those in larger classes, this could be accomplished by dividing students into groups. This allows for a construction and presentation of students' knowledge, which could appeal to different learning styles. Prezi is made more accessible for students and instructors through its free online format. Students can view the Prezi during and after class by using an online link.

Cons

Many of the negative points of Prezi stem from poor planning and understanding of how to use it effectively and differently than traditional slide-based software. For example, overzealousness in using the zooming features can create visual discomfort for viewers. Another possible downside of the program is designing it essentially as a PowerPoint without applying any of the added design benefits; this could result in a resemblance to an over-animated slideshow. Also, text-heavy presentations are not best displayed in Prezi. While you can print a PDF of a Prezi, because of the non-linear nature of most Prezi presentations these PDFs do not make good handouts or notes to provide to students. Because Prezi is still being developed and is free, occasionally designers may encounter glitches; however, they are few and far between.

Suggested Guidelines

Get creative. Prezi removes many of the restrictions that traditional presentation programs foster. How ideas are displayed and what visual components are included in the presentation are largely up to the presenter. As such, it is necessary to understand how the information can be displayed to optimize learning of the content. Be prepared to think outside the constraints of slideshows.

Customize. While there are presets available, there is also the ability to customize the presentation. For most people, customization means changing the colors of different elements, changing font faces, and the ability to add in a logo. For those with knowledge of Web coding (CSS), there is the ability to write code to further customize the presentation.

Illustrate relationships. By being able to alter the location and size of different elements in Prezi, relationships are more easily displayed than they would be in traditional slideshows. Because

nonlinear relationships are more common than linear relationships, Prezi has an advantage over other programs.

Use movement correctly. The ability to move about the canvas is Prezi's strength and weakness. While the approach can create interest and facilitate learning, it can also be used excessively or ineffectively. Think about movement when you are implementing. Think about how it can best be used to facilitate understanding of the material.

Involve students. Students have the ability to be collaborators in Prezi. This process can get students more engaged in actively constructing knowledge. Another means of getting students involved is to allow them to navigate the Prezi on their own. Because there is the option to deviate from the path on Prezi, students can navigate the Prezi to look at information in a manner that best suits their learning needs.

Avoid text-heavy presentations. Prezi is a visual medium. While text can be displayed, Prezi is not the most conducive environment for displaying lengthy text.

Use it purposefully. Prezi should not be used simply because for its novelty factor. While this will initially garner student interest, novelty will wear off and student interest will fade. The authors of this paper have noticed this in their classrooms. Prezi has specific abilities. By using Prezi with these abilities in mind, instructors can be better able to garner student engagement.

Conclusions

The decision to use Prezi is the decision of the instructor. Be mindful of its capabilities and its limitations before implementing it into courses. It has a place in education, but it will not become the dominant presentation medium. For more information or to view tutorials, please visit www.prezi.com.

Literature Cited

Rogers, E. M. (2003). Diffusion of Innovations. 5th ed. New York, NY: Free Press.

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