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STRUCTURING AND FACILITATING ONLINE DISCUSSION:
How can We Maximize the Power of Words in the Virtual Classroom?

Facilitators Notes

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Background:

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The community of inquiry is seminal model in online learning. This approach suggests there are three elements to creating a successful learning experience (see Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2010; deNoyelles, Mannheimer Zydney & Chen, 2014):

- Social Presence - ability of learners to project their personal characteristics into the community of inquiry, thereby presenting themselves as 'real people.'
- Cognitive Presence - the extent to which the participants in any particular configuration of a community of inquiry are able to construct meaning through sustained communication.
 - Triggering event
 - "a state of dissonance or feeling of unease resulting from an experience" (Garrison et al, 2000, p. 98)
 - "Here an issue, dilemma or problem is identified or recognized that emerges from experience. In an educational context the teacher often explicitly communicates expectations or tasks that become triggering events" (Garrison et al, 1999 p. 2).
 - Exploration
 - "...a search for information, knowledge and alternatives that might help to make sense of the situation or problem. searching for clarification and attempting to orient one's attention" (Garrison et al, 2000, p. 98).
 - "...participants shift between the private, reflective world of the individual and the social exploration of ideas" (Garrison et al, 1999 p. 2).
 - Integration
 - "...integrating the information and knowledge into a coherent idea or concept...looking for insights and gaining some understanding of the acquired information and knowledge" (Garrison et al, 2000, p. 98)
 - "...constructing meaning from the ideas generated in the exploratory phase. During the transition from the exploratory phase students will begin to assess the applicability of ideas in terms of how well they connect and describe the issue under consideration... This is the phase that is most difficult to detect from a teaching or research perspective. Evidence of the integration of ideas and the construction of meaning must be inferred from communication within the community of inquiry. This phase often requires active teaching presence to diagnose misconceptions, provide probing questions, and additional information..." (Garrison et al, 1999 p. 2).
 - Resolution
 - "...as an application of an idea or hypothesis. The success of the application and whether the idea is confirmed will determine whether the process of inquiry continues" (Garrison et al, 2000, p. 98)
 - "The fourth phase is a resolution of the dilemma or problem proposed by the triggering event, by means of direct or vicarious action. In the everyday world, this would mean implementing the proposed solution or testing the hypothesis by means of practical application. In an educational context, however, this is somewhat more difficult. It usually entails a vicarious test through thought experiments and consensus building within the community of inquiry" (Garrison et al, 1999, p. 98).
- Teaching Presence - design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educational worthwhile learning outcomes.

- 3) Provide opportunities for socio-emotional discussions..
- 4) Create authentic content-and task-oriented discussions..

Generate extrinsic motivation for students by:

- x Communicating the purpose of discussions in general, and specific discussions. For example:
 - In this discussion, the goal is for you to report in on your experience and/or understanding of....
 - In this discussion, the purpose is to generate discussion between participants and build meaning through engaging with different perspectives.
 - In this discussion, the purpose is to build community by sharing information about yourself, for you to enable others to see you as a complex and multi-dimensional person.
- x Grade online discussions
 - The # of messages and the sense of community both increase when online discussions comprise 10-20% of grade. However, there appears to be no additional benefits beyond this (i.e. 25-35%) (Rovai, 2003)
- x Customize and contextualize discussions
 - Select appropriate group size for different task discussions (i.e. dyad, small group, whole class).
 - *...approximately ten students is a reasonable estimate for the minimum critical mass ... At the opposite end of this continuum, 20- 30 students are the most for a single forum with active discussions* (Rovai, 2007, p 81).
 - Allow students to choose discussion topics.
 - Draw on diverse learner backgrounds and perspectives of a topic.

Describe the ground rules for online discussions

- x Allow time for training students to participate and facilitate
- x Don't assume self-efficacy
 - Contributing to generative online discussions, as opposed to reporting in, requires "learning a different form of communication" (Levy, 2003, p. 102).
 - "In the same way instructors should not expect that students become successful team players just because they are assigned to teams... Careful planning needs to be put into the instructional activities, such as modeling online facilitation, being present in the discussions, as well as preparing students before they take the lead in the discussion" (Barran & Correia, 2009, p 358).
- x Create a detailed rubric
 - Rovai (2007),
 -

Create authentic content-and task-oriented discussions

courses. *Journal of Computing in Higher Education*, 15(1), 89-107.

- Rovai, A. P. (2007). Facilitating online discussions effectively. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 10(1), 77-88.

Other

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recommendation is to establish specific “conference rooms” - Elicit individual AND group postings
<p>Technology: wiki, blogs, linear discussion threads</p> <p>Purpose: building social presence/community vs engagement with content</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ROVAI et al 2007 (pg 82) As a fina

has been identified as an important factor for effective online interaction (Hara et al., 2000; Zhu, 1998). Research also

	<p>The design of online discussion activities requires a thorough learner and needs analysis designing the online activities to target learners' needs, expectations, and constraints. Careful planning needs to be put into the instructional activities, such as modeling online facilitation, being present in the discussions, as well as preparing students before they take the lead in the discussions.</p>
<p>Example of Content/Task Discussion Design: ORIGINAL EXAMPLE AND VALUE ADDED COMMENTS (Mannheimer 2001, p21- 22)</p>	<p>The effect of having two deadlines, one in which initial comments were due before peer comments. Statistical differences appeared (Herrick et al 2011)</p>