

Chapter 46

Writing Bees, Wikis, Problem–Based Learning, and Assessment: Teaching With Online Discussions

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ABSTRACT

This chapter introduces a case study to explore the pedagogical re-design of an online module using online discussions as the focus for learning. A longitudinal and development module assessment was threaded through three phases of learning: 1) writing bees, 2) WIKI (what I know is), and 3) problem-based learning (PBL). Each phase of learning is explained using evidence to support its development, and a critique of the benefits and limitations of learning this way is included. An evaluation of the re-designed module is included, demonstrating although at times the online discussion and writing activities were challenging that on the whole, students enjoyed learning in this way. This chapter concludes by claiming that the pedagogical design of learning using online discussions should be engaging, interactive, collaborative, and fully supported at every stage of the learners' journey and recommends further research in the theory of communities of practice to inform such pedagogical design.

INTRODUCTION

Poor online pedagogical design can be a disappointing experience not only for the learner, but also for the online teacher. This chapter shares the evidence-based re-design of an online applied sciences (AS1) module that was evaluated by students in their first year of a Bachelor of Nursing degree programme as disconnected, poorly structured, and poorly communicated. Pedagogical considerations undertaken prior to and during the re-design of the AS1 module reflected a desire to enhance the students' online learning experience to reflect what Justice (2017, p. 1) refers to as the 3Cs of effective online instruc-

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tion: “connectivity, compassion, and communication”, with the intention of incorporating pedagogical strategies to encourage deep learning (Biggs, 2011). .

The significance of sharing this journey is important because despite the possibilities that Web 2.0 (writing and participating web) digital technologies afford the development of new paradigms of learning, many online learning experiences have been claimed to be disappointing. It is likely that such experiences relate to the use of virtual learning environments as repositories for resources and information, as opposed to designing evidence-based, meaningful, appropriate and purposeful collaborative interaction through varying forms of online discussion. This paradigm shift towards evidence-based authentic online learning is at the core of this *Handbook of Research for Online Discussions*, the content of which has the potential, through online discussion, to stimulate cooperative, collaborative and pedagogic processes in learning (Markauskaite & Goodyear, 2017). Indeed, it has long been established that discussion as a learning tool can facilitate dynamic debate and the sharing of divergent positions (Brookfield, 1986). Discussion as an educational tool is reflective of social constructivism, a philosophical stance claimed by Vygotsky (1962) among others that knowledge is not didactically acquired; rather it is constructed through interaction, subjective interpretation in a social learning environment. Learning in this way has been considered to be a principally situated (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and context-bound endeavour (Eggen & Kauchak, 2015; Liu & Matthews, 2005; McInerney, 2013). If it is agreed that educational discussion is the conduit for learning, then online discussion has the potential for interactivity, between students and their peers, students and teachers using online resources in a way that might be different from face-to-face communication, yet equally effective.

The context for this chapter is ‘networked-learning’ which is defined as “learning in which information communication technology (ICT) is used to promote connections: between one learner and other learners, between learners and tutors; between a learning community and its learning resources” (Goodyear, Banks, Hodgson, & McConnell, 2004, p. 1) as opposed to other forms of digitally-mediated learning that might not take the same pedagogical approach. Background information relating to the problems reported in the poorly evaluated first online iteration of AS1 will be examined. Next, in the form of a case-study, I share the development and evidence-based rationale behind three phases of a bespoke, pedagogically aligned networked-learning approach, designed to meet the learning outcomes of AS1 within which the online assessment was interwoven. As with any learning activity, it is not only the learning outcomes that are important. Of equal importance is the journey that each learner takes in developing their knowledge around the subject area: this will be considered and presented using the evidence-base to inform ways that stimulate a supported, collaborative and meaningful online learning and assessment experience.

BACKGROUND

While it is difficult for face-to-face teachers to avoid using technology altogether, online teachers are dependent on it for much of their work. Many teachers currently find themselves in a position where the context of their face-to-face teaching is changing to incorporate digital technologies as part of their everyday teaching practice, where communicating online feels different. This change in communication style is particularly significant within healthcare education delivery where traditionally, considerable emphasis is placed on good verbal and non-verbal body language. Excellent, evidence-based communication in its myriad of forms is considered essential to determining quality and appropriate person-centred

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