

REFLECTING ON MY DISCUSSIONS

Reflection



Syeita Rhey-Fisher

DECEMBER, 2017

POST UNIVERSITY

Prof. Linda Keiser

Table of Contents

Table of Content.....	1
Introduction.....	2
Discussion Prompts.....	2
Facilitation Strategies.....	3
Lessons Learned.....	4

Reflecting on My Discussions

Introduction

Engaging discussions and instructor involvement is key to ensuring an effective online experience for learners. I was really grateful for the opportunity to practice creating discussion prompts and facilitating for the past two weeks. It gave me the chance to put what I learned through course readings and videos into action.

Discussion Prompts

I felt that my prompts were effective and engaging for the learners who chose to do them. I had minimal participation during my first discussion even though the questions were open-ended and allowed different viewpoints. I took the time to read all of my peer's discussion questions during both weeks. I observed that questions that were simple, to the point and did not include a lot of unnecessary wording were selected. It seemed that my peers responded to discussion prompts that were the least complicated and confusing.

But ultimately, I believe the lack of participation on my discussion thread was due to me not being present earlier on. I entered into the second week of facilitation with some goal setting for myself. I had three areas in which I wanted to improve after the first week's reflection, construction of discussion prompt, presence through prompt feedback and soliciting engagement through facilitation on my thread while encouraging continued conversation with others (ie: asking questions to spark additional responses).

During the second week, I made sure my presence was known much sooner, provided discussion prompt options and gave feedback almost immediately during facilitated discussions. However, I had even fewer responses than the first week. This caused me to reevaluate my discussion prompt questions and strategies. My challenge with creating a discussion prompt was selecting a question(s) that was higher order level, relevant, engaging and unique to questions asked on other discussion board threads.

According to the article, "How-to Make Group Work Collaborative in Online Courses: Four Strategies," collaborative learning or CL is achieved when students help each other to learn. One of the four strategies to make groups more collaborative is to both "model and support the development of collaborative skills." (Morrison, 2014) My attempt at doing this was asking learners to answer my discussion prompt question than respond to one of their peer's posts within my discussion post. By doing this, my peers would not only be interacting with each other, but also offering personal stories to learn from one another.

Facilitation Strategies

“Facilitate and be involved in group activities” (Morrison, 2014) is another strategy provided for successful and collaborative groups. I did not have as much opportunity to facilitate due to lack of responses so it is difficult to completely gage my effectiveness.

I wanted to be effective by allowing the discussion to be student-led and only act as a facilitator as supposed to it being teacher-led. This is essential to promoting self-regulation among learners and ownership over their discussions. (Snyder, 2014)

I realize that not everyone will be as actively involved so it is important that when responses are given by learners, you engage within an appropriate amount of time to give them ample time to reply. Thinking along these lines, I decided to monitor and respond very quickly to anyone who responded to my response on their discussion threads to ensure that I could engage in meaningful conversation. The strategy I used was answering then asking follow up questions to extend. Since I didn't have as much responses on my own thread, I tried to do this on other threads. I believe I was more effective for this reason with facilitating during the second week of discussions than the first. I was able to engage with one of my peers on his thread discussion after asking follow-up questions. I had no responses to any of my follow-up questions during the first week so this was an improvement.

It also reminded me how back in unit 1, I read about the profiles of online learners, their characteristics and how they were becoming more diverse. One of the characteristics of successful online learners listed was that they are self-motivated. So I am contemplating on how to encourage online learners for my future courses to be intrinsically motivated and to have more endurance when answering and then following up with discussion prompts. (Palloff & Pratt, 2013)

Another strategy was “make the assessment criteria explicit.” (Morrison, 2014) I believed that creating a checklist would help learners to better understand the expectations for my discussion thread and how to be successful (see table A). I tried to make it as simple as possible. I thought this would also be a way or example of how to assign individual value to learners. A clear purpose and goals are a crucial part of setting guidelines for collaborative groups. (Nufer, 2016) I would also describe this as a way to pre-facilitate by allowing the checklist to guide learners and keep them accountable.

Table A:

CHECKLIST for this Unit 7 Thread	
	Select ONE prompt choice from the provide list

	Answer the prompt based on personal experience and/or readings
	Respond to at least ONE of your peer's response in this thread

The discussion question needs to also be precise to prevent learners from either missing the point of the discussion question, not answering every part of the question or not reading through all of the directions. This is another reason why facilitation is so important, to ensure that students are following along with the spirit of the discussion and are on the right path. While I observed confusion on other threads, this was not necessarily a problem in my discussions.

Lessons Learned

My greatest takeaway from creating discussion prompts and facilitating is that while the discussion questions should be engaging, challenging and invoke higher level thinking, it absolutely needs to be very precise. Online learners appear to respond better to simple, cleanly written questions that are less complicated.

This activity has impacted the way I will teach future online courses in two major ways. I am cognizant of the effectiveness of ensuring my presence is felt. I will accomplish this by staying involved and providing feedback so that students have every opportunity to be successful. And in the spirit of being a life-long learner, I will continue to research and find ways to help my online learners be more intrinsically motivated and to improve my personal practice to become a better online practitioner.

References

Morrison, D. (2014). *How-to Make Group Work Collaborative in Online Courses: Four Strategies*. Online Learning Insights. Retrieved from URL:
<https://onlinelearninginsights.wordpress.com/2014/08/14/how-to-make-group-work-collaborative-in-online-courses-four-strategies/>

Nufer, S. (2016). *How to Build Group Projects Your Online Student will Love*. Pearson. Retrieved from URL:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Hcn_i8kDPphbRakx3U1zcrbj0C7c48NCggJuPU0DBQQ/edit

Palloff, R. M., & Pratt, K. (2013). *Lessons From the Virtual Classroom: The Realities of Online Teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Snyder, M. (2014, December 5). *Five Ideas to Engage Online Learners*. Retrieved from URL:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Je4s484ZhbE>

Watanabe-Crockett, L. (2017). *The 10 Most Important Things to Know About Reflective Learning*. Global Citizen Digital Foundation. Retrieved from URL:
<https://globaldigitalcitizen.org/reflective-learning-matters>