

Say What? The Quality of Discussion Board Postings in Online Professional Development

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e-Read Ohio

- Online PD system for Ohio teachers
 - Since 2003 – 2004 : 14 courses, 475 schools, 11,787 course participants
- Online module, face-to-face sessions, and asynchronous online discussion board
 - collaboration and interaction,
 - knowledge acquisition
 - professional discussions
 - common knowledge base
 - how practice reflects online course content
 - improving instructional strategies

Research Questions

- Previous e-Read research findings
 - learning in blended and online courses similar to face-to-face
 - didactic pedagogy in modules rather than constructivist focus
 - high opportunity for learner engagement
 - subsequent module design improved
- Current study
 - What are the characteristics of the discussion board prompts?
 - To what extent do postings exhibit rigor and relevance?
 - What is the influence of the prompt on discussions?

Research Methods

- Analysis of 3 discussion boards
- Instruments – updated Bloom's and Puntambekar, et. al.

Code	Description
0	Contributions are shallow, reflecting little or no thought about the topic of discussion
2	Contributions reflect limited thoughtfulness, comments are primarily opinions that are not supported by appropriate theory or course material
4	Contributions show thoughtfulness; comments are primarily opinions, however there is limited support from theory and course materials
6	Contributions show thoughtfulness; opinions are supported by appropriate theory and course materials
8	Contributions are extremely thoughtful; opinions are supported with appropriate course material. Other participant comments along with personal experiences are synthesized and incorporated into a well-developed argument.

Characteristics of prompts

- No instruction to use theory or course material to support statements (Puntambekar)
- Bloom's levels - apply (level 3) to evaluate (level 5)
- Level of instructor questions correlated with level of student responses (Bloom)

Rigor of Postings

- Rigor of student postings
 - descriptions of instructional practices
 - little reference to theory or course material
 - often limited to encouragement or support
- Rigor of instructor postings
 - related to instructional practices
 - little reference to theory or course material
 - differences among instructors

Implications

- Characteristics of Discussion Prompts
 - explicitly instruct participants to connect practices to course content or relevant theory
 - offer higher-level prompts to encourage higher-level responses
- Rigor in Postings
 - challenge students to provide more comprehensive or thoughtful response



- Instructors model appropriate responses
 - instructor training on architecture of strong online discussion
 - instructor training on how to challenge deeper thinking in online environment
 - student information on expectations for discussions



- Contextual Factors
 - face-to-face discussions among participants
 - pass/fail credit
 - participants may not have chosen course
 - no rubric for discussion board engagement
- Implications for Coding Online Discussions
 - Results consistent with Putambekar's findings
 - Example of clear system



Future Research to Examine Relationships Between...

- student characteristics (time that students have to devote, reasons for taking course, motivation) and quality of posting
- facilitator's course load and discussion board effectiveness
- instructors' knowledge of course content and level of questions



References

- Puntambekar, S. (2006). Analyzing collaborative interactions: Divergence, shared understanding, and construction of knowledge. *Computers and Education*, 47, 332-351.

