Running head: ENCOURAGING PARTICIPATION

M6 Encouraging Participation Paper

Susan Strickland

AT Still University

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Joshua Bernstein, Ph.D. CHES

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**Introduction**

Discussion forum participation has issues related to its identity. It is asynchronous and has slower reaction times. Participants have more time to consider how they will respond to the initial question and then responses of their classmates. The positive side of the asynchronous discussion forum is that all classmates are involved and the quality of responses may be greater than that of a face-to-face class because the student has the option and opportunity to add to the discussion forum with a response that has the potential to be supported by readings and/or research (Cotton, 2008).

**Optional versus Required Participation**

There are required and optional strategies to encourage participation. When participation is optional some only view the forum as an enhancement of instruction or as an alternative communication tool to email. When participation is optional some students will rarely if ever take part. Optional discussion forums are usually non-assessed.

When participation is required students usually will view the discussion forum as a critical instruction tool. The discussion forum is often used as a class interaction strategy and is normally assessed. In fact, when assessed, there usually is a minimum standard for participation (Cotton, 2008).

**Strategies to Promote Participation**

It is important to match objectives and content to the strategy employed to encourage participation. There are various methods of interaction. They can be teacher guided or student guided. In the teacher-guided strategy, the teacher is in the dominant role. The teacher acts as the person who introduces the facts, acts as the challenger and moderates the discussion. In the student-guided strategy, there is low teacher input. The discussion forum becomes student moderated and driven.

**Strategic Methods**

In order to keep the strategy fresh, the strategic methods should be varied to encourage participation. Some ideas include:

* Team activities that use group forums to begin the discussion together in a small group and then bring to groups together at the end of the week.
* Shared research-report findings to interject new information
* Rotating leadership-a different student chairs the discussion forum for a week.
* Encourage peer support. Students may answer questions before instructor.

**Facilitating an Online Discussion**

As a facilitator of an online discussion forum, I would find great pleasure in being the person posing challenging questions as well as being the devil’s advocate and throw out statement opposite of what people are saying to provoke responses. I do think that people are more compelled to respond when they feel like they have something to defend. I would not necessarily agree with what I may write, it would be to almost force people to feel they must respond. I also like the idea of trying group forums on a small project, assigning a group leader to present the finding and then invite the rest of the group to respond. Something a little different from I respond, you respond, I respond, and then you respond.

From the strategic method list, I tried to employ shared research-report findings to interject new information. Best practices seemed like great place to begin.

(Facilitator): Best practice and powerful learning reaches the greatest depth,

speed, and ability to apply (Research Resources, n.d.). If only all

students realize how powerful they become when they begin to

apply what they learn. I read about best practices and powerful

learning is really demonstrated by "immersion and enriched with

hands on of the real thing" (Research Resources, n.d.).

Maybe the assessment needs to be more than a traditional exam.

In science, we use to do hands on exams (practicals) with stations

that had questions and a model or microscope. This was a

powerful method to learn. Do you think this type of assessment

could be applied in other types of courses?

(Response): yes, yes, yes, yes, yes!!!!

(Facilitator): But is what you have in your "head" as important

as your performance? Perhaps best evidence has shown us that

what people do with their hands is more important and the AED

assists/directs you in performance. What do you think?

(Response): I like the idea...anyone can "describe" what to do

but if they do not have the practical skills to perform correctly

than the knowledge is almost useless... : (

Oh yes and speaking of technology, we have some dummies that

actually count the number of "good" chest presses and rescue

breaths....cool huh?

Perhaps this attempt should have been worded or not tagged on to one discussion thread, since I had one bite on the question and received a one word answer. With a second question the same person responded with a more pointed response. Perhaps it just requires keeping at the question until a more thoughtful answer results. I tried a few challenging questions on a few other discussion threads. A second attempt to use a little research with a question was pointed at writing styles.

Brooks (2009) remarks poor writing samples trip up many a job seeker.

She recommends, "know that a lot of people don't send a sample-so i

f you send one, your chances of scoring an interview just improved.

Requiring a writing sample usually drops the candidate pool in half-only

about 50% of candidates will take the time to send one. That makes it

easier for the recruiter- fewer applicants to consider. (Oh-and if you're

thinking you can ignore the request for the writing sample and still

remain in contention for the position, think again.)".

Do you think that only writing samples are necessary for jobs requiring communication skills? Should the writing sample be submitted online

or in person?

This is another case where I believe I have been too pointed in the question by directing the research related question into one person’s discussion thread. Perhaps I would have been more successful starting a new thread. I was getting no bites. The other way to try to facilitate the discussion forum is to pose challenging or controversial questions.

What are your feelings on a refresher course and do you think it

provides enough extra training? Do you think it should be done

every 6 months or every year?

Personally I think yearly is plenty.

Here again, I receive a very short reply. The question I posed did not provide opportunity for something more than a yes or no response. In this next scenario, the only thing I received was my question answered by a question.

(Facilitators question): What if there is a technology you

want to employ but it is not available? Do you plan to use

it and try to get the institution to purchase it?

(Response): Wouldn't it be great if you could have a trial

semester to prove your point about using a certain technology?

Perhaps as the facilitator of the discussion I would have more success. The questions should also be open-ended. The other three strategic methods I mentioned would require the facilitator to assign teams, assign weeks to each individual to facilitate or I would have to encourage peer support by posing questions that would grab the attention of more than one individual.

**Conclusion**

The online discuss forum is an excellent what to promote peer support and discussion to an asynchronous course. Variety may encourage participation and certainly, required participation means the student cannot go AWOL. Value is added to the discussion by the many perspectives each student can provide. Willingness to be open and ready to go the extra mile will attach importance for all participants to the discussion. Using shared research to report findings to interject new information may require starting a new discussion to make it a point to get more than one person to get involved in the discussion surrounding the point being made.

References

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