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Roundtable Discussion- *Technology in Nursing Education*

AACU – The Use of Technology to Enhance Reflection on Practice

The use of online discussion, as an effective and exciting teaching and learning strategy, has been widely documented in the literature over the last 5 years. Therefore, based on the literature findings and my personal frustration related to the lack of in- depth student reflection as evidenced by the suboptimal participation of the students, I decided to “try out” the integration of asynchronous online discussion as a learning strategy. This strategy was designed to support reflection on professional nursing practice and to meet affective and personal development liberal learning goals of this student group.

What are the essential elements, anticipated advantages and potential disadvantages of online discussion learning?

Online discussion have been described as an excellent environment supporting peer and collaborative learning, fostering active learning, encouraging higher order thinking skills, improving writing skills, enhancing professional socialization, and reducing anxiety students may experience related to face to face discussions. Other benefits include strengthening the teacher to student interaction, providing a common descriptive text that develops over weeks, fostering student empowerment, increasing computer confidence and allowing for flexibility in posting of responses (Lam, 2004) Other authors emphasize that computer-mediated discussion should strive to foster democracy and community and has “the potential to allow for divergent perspective, balance power relations between teacher and student, give a voice to the marginalized groups, and provide opportunities

for the thoughtful reflective discourse that characterizes critical thinking” (Fauske & Wade, 2003/2004, pg. 137).

Disadvantages of online discussion that have been identified in the literature include server problems, greater time investment, increase in student expectations, and confessional journal entries (Wright & Bowery, 2003) Several online discussion applications depending on the course objectives can be crafted for online use.

Applications such as single, trigger thought provoking questions, case studies, critiques, investigative reporting, debates, role-playing, reaction papers, and miscellaneous educational topics are all possibilities that can be addressed via an online discussion format (Hazari, 2004).

How might faculty help students approach online learning effectively?

Not surprisingly, faculty expertise in the creating, selecting, and use of the technology is a major factor impacting student satisfaction. Considerations such as the active role of the instructor as facilitator and modeler of the critical thinking process are paramount. The importance of showing “instructor presence” through postings and personalization of the postings can enhance a sense of community for the group. Thoughtful planning in selecting appropriate applications related to learning outcomes as well as clearly communicating expectations related to civility, amount and quality of contributions, and receptiveness to new ideas is essential. A semiformal writing style was suggested rather than the more formal academic writing that is expected in a formal paper. Additionally, from a practical perspective, ongoing technical support is essential to avoid frustration for both students and instructors for successful online participation.

In concluding, the presenter related that she plans to further develop this strategy and plans to design a study that would further contribute to validating the effectiveness of online discussion supporting reflection on practice and the meeting of liberal learning goals.

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