Effective strategies for a discussion board in early childhood education: Implications for both online and live courses

By Ellen Cerniglia, Ed.D.

Associate Professor of Education

Graduate School of Education and Psychology, Touro College

Agenda

- Welcome & Introduction
- Activity & Review
- Pros and Cons of an online discussion board (DB) as compared with a live discussion
- Best Practices for online DB
- Why you should add a DB to a live class and best practices for doing it
- Professor's role in the DB

Activity

- Discuss the issue of play in Kindergarten. There is increasing criticism that play is being taken out of K more and more and some feel there will be repercussions for the children. There are a lot of opinions and ideas around this issue so I would like you to discuss this either verbally or in writing with each other depending on your table. You have 5 minutes

Review

- Each group should now formulate a few pros and a few cons for their method of discussion.
    - How did it work?
    - What worked well?
    - What made it difficult?
    - What would have made it better?
- Take a few minutes and then share what you have come up with. (5 minutes)

First Things First

- Who I teach/Individualized strategies
- Survey Tool

Pros to online DB: Time

- "…a discussion online gives you more time to think and internalize what you're reading before responding."

- "I have more time to read and respond to other's posts and I can put my thoughts and knowledge down in writing for all to see not just as an assignment to be graded. I think it much more effective and more information is shared and more knowledge is utilized."

Pros to online DB: Comfort Level

- "I do feel that people will be more honest on the discussion board since it is behind a computer. I know that I am not very vocal in class, however, I had to respond online and I could say whatever I felt without judgment of others."

- "I think some students may feel more empowered to give their opinions or ideas on a topic on a discussion board instead of live, because they might be uneasy speaking in front of a large public group. In the discussion board, it seems to be easier to take a risk in writing."

- "Nobody is going to cut you off or you don't have to feel embarrassed if you're wrong or right."

Pros to online DB: Planning and Meaning

- "It allows me the time to really think about what I want to say and express it clearly and well organized. When I am required to speak in a live class whether it be for a presentation or a mere discussion of a topic, I get very nervous and clam up. I also lose my train of thought and forget what I really wanted to say."

- "I have more time to read and respond to others posts and I can put my thoughts and knowledge down in writing for all to see not just as an assignment to be graded. I think it much more effective and more information is shared and more knowledge is utilized."

Pros to online DB: Participation & Exposure to Experiences

- "I think the online gives everybody a chance to speak vs, live classes, most just listen and some don't even participate. When I am in live class, I feel that I have to fight others to gain the professors attention and it's no fun because there will always be some that are outspoken and some who are just quiet."

- "It guides me to digest the readings deeper. It gives me insights to other's point of view some of which I might have missed because I have different experiences or exposures."

Cons to Online DB

- Lag time between posts amongst participants; taking more time to get to the same place

- Lack of spontaneity - "The questions are set, compared to a live class, certain responses trigger additional questions. Spontaneity is missing in online classes."

- Meaning can get confused or misconstrued easier in electronic discussions

- Level of formality that students use differs

- More difficult to use lecture to draw out ideas and experiences

- Posts can be repetitive at times because of the asynchronous nature of the communication

- Some responses posted add little to the discussion with students simply agreeing or encouraging rather than adding to the ideas in a meaningful way

What students said

- Surveyed online students said that the most effective part of the DB is/was:
    1. learning from other students and responding to them
    2. learning and applying from real life experiences
    3. learning from the professor and her comments/questions

- "The most effective part of the discussion board was the class interaction. I enjoyed reading everyone's responses, comments and insights. It was great that everyone was so eager to share their own work experiences, informational websites and ideas."

Best Practice: DB in an online course
(based on surveys & teaching experience)

- Make it a ***Discussion*** Board
  - Not mini-papers for assignments
  - Ask students to respond to other posts
- Give choices for the assignments and encourage opportunities to share personal experiences
- Use rules and deadlines to promote discussion
- Set up course so students are all working on the same DB assignment at the same time
- Be participatory as a professor

Best Practice: Role of Professor

- Respond at least once to each student for each assignment
  - "I also appreciated very much that you took the time and made sure to comment as well as add a question to each post. Firstly, unfortunately there are many professors that just check IF you've posted and don't actually grade you on content, so it was good to know someone's actually reading my work. Additionally, the questions that you added to the posts helped me to think deeper into what I and others were writing. I also appreciated that we did not have a discussion board to do when we had another assignment to do."

Best Practice: Role of Professor

- Acknowledge/praise something within the comments if appropriate, and elicit further information by:
  - questioning the student about something he/she said,
  - asking for the student to elaborate or expand on an idea,
  - asking the student to clarify, or
  - challenging the student's assertion by presenting an alternate viewpoint
- Model this so students also respond in this way instead of "I agree" or a response that does not add to the discussion
- Model the appropriate type of language balancing the formal with the informal
- Let students Lead
- Create a Conversational Tone

Why add a DB to a live class?

- Time - there is never enough
- Gives all students a voice - especially those who are less comfortable speaking in class
  - Allows professor to individualize instruction
- Preparation - students have to post and respond before class so they come in prepared
    - "It gave me a chance to reflect on the information that we read before we came to class."
    - "Discussion board was very effective for me because by answering the guide questions before every class, I came to class prepared. I understood what we are talking about in class. Reading about my classmate's post is also informative. I learned some points that I might have paid attention to when I'm doing my own reading."
    - "Being able to discuss situations on the discussion board, and then continuing the discussions in class."
- Increase technology literacy of students

Best Practice:
DB in a live class

- Variety - these students also have class time so add to this experience, don't replicate it. Ensure that there is less repetition and more personal experience.
- Simplify it - these students spend hours in class so make sure that the assignments are a little less taxing than in an online class
- Use it in preparation - have students post prior to the lecture and discussion in class to encourage them to read and be prepared
- Utilize the comments - bring them into the class using them as a starting point each week

Potential Barriers

- Technology
  - Lack of access
  - Lack of familiarity
- Less comfortable putting their ideas in writing and not being anonymous
- Resistance to online learning

Final Conclusion

- Research to Practice and vice versa
  - Integrating ongoing evaluation and assessment into your teaching in a simple, yet informative way to better your teaching practice

Questions/Comments

Please feel free to ask or comment.