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Lens on Learning Principles

The following **seven principles of good practice in undergraduate education**, developed by Chickering and Gamson in 1987, continue to guide the planning and delivery of education activities in postsecondary institutions.

Principles of Good practice in undergraduate education:

1. encourages contact between students and faculty,
2. develops reciprocity and cooperation among students,
3. encourages active learning,
4. gives prompt feedback,
5. emphasizes time on task,
6. communicates high expectations, and
7. respects diverse talents and ways of learning.

Online discussion supports these principles in the following ways:

- Gives students time to think before making their ideas public
- Draws out the ideas of more introvert or shy students
- Provides opportunities for international students to contribute comfortably
- Offers students flexibility in when they can make their contributions
- Gets students writing more frequently, with a real purpose, for a real audience
- Documents student thinking on a topic/issue
- Allows students to see examples of work that can act as a model for improvement
- Creates individual accountability for learning
- Provides teachers with a collective overview of the class climate/learning.



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Reflection on Practice

1. What course related issues or application of course content could be enhanced by more student to student dialogue?
2. How can you structure discussions to effectively facilitate learning (i.e. goals, topics, expectations, assessment)?
3. What impact might the use of online discussions have on your classroom delivery and/or evaluation scheme?

Expanding Your Teaching Toolkit

1. Generating Online Discussion

In order to get students involved in online discussions, it is important to give them something worthwhile to talk about, and to reward them appropriately for their contributions. Below are several ways that faculty have used online discussions successfully:

- Introduce themselves to others in the class
- Discuss societal trends and their relation to the subject discipline.
- Share ideas, examples, and/or resources (i.e. websites, articles, books) related to a course concept
- Review and/or analyze various information resources (i.e. websites, articles, video clips, images, editorials, news items)
- Solve discipline-related problems using course theories, models, case studies etc.

- Articulate and support an opinion using evidence, research, data, etc.
- Encourage student to student interaction related to assignments (feedback, questions)
- Have students practice a variety of discussion roles (i.e. manager, researcher, responder, summarizer)
- Explore a course related issues that you may not have time for in class
- Create a space for group project discussions, a debate, a role-play, or posting assignments

2. Structuring Online Discussions

Just as with any instructional activity, structure is key to effective learning. This includes defining expectations, and integrating the activity into your overall curriculum.

- **Tips for defining expectations**
 - Define and communicate expectations for things such as the following clearly and explicitly: frequency of posts, timelines for posts length, content, quality, format)
 - Provide students with examples of thoughtful postings.
 - Make sure your expectations are reasonable given the workload of the course.
 - Establish a weekly rhythm that generates interaction amongst the students (i.e. first post by mid-week, and a reply to someone else's post by the end of the week).
- **Tips for integrating online discussion into your curriculum**
 - Link participation to marks
 - Explain how the activity links to learning outcomes for the course
 - Use discussion content in your teaching (i.e. talk about highlights, expand on points or questions in class, develop test questions related to discussion content, build an assignment around content)

3. Facilitating Online Discussions

The role of the teacher in an online discussion is fourfold – Getting it started, monitoring the dialogue, providing feedback and direction, and evaluating contributions.

- **Tips for getting started**
 - Provide clear instructions (demonstrate if possible) as to how to post and reply (Distribute the Blackboard Tip Sheet for using the Discussion Board)
 - Communicate expectations clearly and frequently (verbally, in writing, electronically, reminders)
 - Establish discussion etiquette (netiquette)
 - Teach students how to write for the reader, support an opinion, and disagree constructively
- **Tips for monitoring the dialogue and providing feedback and direction**
 - Monitor cognitive processes (how students are thinking about topic, how they are processing info), and try to move thinking and learning to higher levels (or deeper thought).
 - As the facilitator, contribute about 10-15% of the posts. Be selective in what you respond to.
 - Model the type of thinking you would like to see students demonstrate.
 - Manage the interpersonal dynamics carefully, and deal with inappropriate behaviours immediately.
- **Tips for evaluating contributions**
 - Find and implement strategies to keep evaluation manageable (i.e. Develop a simple rubric).
 - Link evaluation to course outcomes
 - Evaluate both initial posts and interaction with others

More Information and Ideas

On the Web

- Chickering, A. W. & Ehrmann, S. C. (1996, October). Implementing the Seven Principles: Technology as Lever. *AAHE Bulletin*, 3-6. Retrieved October 2009 from <http://www.tltgroup.org/programs/seven.html>
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In the Centre for Teaching and Learning

- Collison, G., Elbaum, B., Haavind, S., & Tinker, R. (2000). *Facilitating learning online: Effective strategies for moderators*. Madison, WI: Atwood Publishing.
- Klemm, W. R. (n.d.). Eight ways to get students more engaged in online discussions. Blackboard Inc. Retrieved October 2009 from http://www.georgianc.on.ca/staff/ctl/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/Eight_Ways_Engage_Conferences.pdf