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Think again! Transformative online pedagogy and the student who says 'I am uncomfortable communicating with unknown people online'

Conference or Workshop Item

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World Conference
on Online Learning
DUBLIN Ireland 2019



28th ICDE
World Conference
on Online Learning

3-7 November 2019
Convention Centre Dublin, Ireland



Think again! Transformative online pedagogy and the student who says 'I am uncomfortable communicating with unknown people online'?

ICDE World Conference of Online Learning, Dublin, November 2019

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Introduction – since submission, we have a publication...

Lynda Griffin & James Roy (2019) A **great resource** that should be utilised more, but **also a place of anxiety**: student perspectives on using an online discussion forum, *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning*, DOI: [10.1080/02680513.2019.1644159](https://doi.org/10.1080/02680513.2019.1644159) Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/02680513.2019.1644159>

Look out for a forthcoming OpenLearn course: ‘Building confidence to learn through online forums’ Email: james.roy@open.ac.uk

THINK AGAIN!

Re-think:

- How we work with students who need to use online forums
- Our naïve assumptions
- ‘just do it! ‘cos it’s good for you’

Context: the **Open** University – set up in 1969 to take just about **anyone** -> challenges

Being **OPEN** ... being **INCLUSIVE**

- **hear** online distance learners' views
- shake up **naive assumptions** re online pedagogy.
- **acknowledge** students may feel **nervous, anxious, or afraid** of posting online to strangers
- **reassure**, not patronise
- **Realistic** encouragement
- **understanding** of the **challenges** for students
- **Some** will **prefer** to **read-only**

A scholarship project undertaken in 2015-16

What we did ...

- 2 short survey questions -> 5748 **students** at Level 1, 2, 3 and postgraduate. (1st years to postgraduate).
- **What did you like about using your Tutor Group Forum on ...?' and 2)**
- **What did you not like about using your Tutor Group Forum on ...?**
- **7.5% response rate** with **429** student responses.
- ranged from 2-3 lines, to mini-essays
- over 58,500 words of data -> 134-page document

Starting with the learner voice ...

S8: I used the forum occasionally more as a social tool to ***communicate with other members on my course***, especially the people that I met at tutorials. What I liked was that I could see Q&As from others but ***I was not so keen on posting on there myself because it's so open for everyone else to see.***

(emphases mine)

TWO common themes: Forums seen as primarily ***social + a reluctance, reticence, shyness, nervousness about actually engaging on forums***

Social space and sense of community

Sense of community/group -> support from each other (ALL levels): Without them there would be no feeling of being in a group. (S75) I liked the interactivity of the forum, the possibility of exchanging perceptions and enriching my views with the hybridity of thoughts..(S382) (M) I found it quite a good help, as well as useful to know that you had that level of support available, not just from the tutor, but also from each other.(S53)

Forum as a social tool – reduces isolation (ALL levels): ‘a valued source of emotional support not just purely for academic use’. (S11) ‘we all worked well as a team n it was nice to hear other people's concerns in this course so I didn't feel alone it was nice that everyone supported n encouraged each other on the e210 module’ (S336)

Reducing distance and isolation

Level 1: S132: It feels like there is support there and everyone is in the same boat with the studies . S150: it made me feel that I had others around me who were experiencing the same highs and lows alongside me

Level 2: S346 If I was struggling with any aspect of the course it was a place you could share your worries and get support from others

Level 3: S194 (Level 3): made me feel as if I wasn't 'alone' in my studies and realised others were facing the same sort of problems/issues I had myself.

A source of possible anxiety

...

Nervousness & insecurity

S186 (Level 3): 'I felt I was publicising how stupid I really am'.

S220 (Level 2): 'As a dyslexic it was stressful writing things that everyone else would see and it just added to the amount of reading ...'

S91 (Level 1): 'I hated that some work had to be posted into the forums, I felt it was unnecessary stress and it made me very anxious and self conscious'

S121 (Level 1): 'I am uncomfortable communicating with unknown people online'.

OpenLearn course planned – for 2020 ...

OpenLearn ->

- launched in 2006
- around 60 million visitors since then.
- URL is: www.open.edu/openlearn
OR at: : www.openlearn.com
- Twitter: @OUFreeLearning
- OpenLearn Course planned: ***Building confidence to learn through online forums*** – ready for mid-2020
- Keep in touch to find out more:
james.roy@open.ac.uk



Practical implications for online pedagogy

- Tutor **presence** is vitally important in asynchronous online tuition;
- **Acknowledge** -> **nervous, anxious** -> posting online to strangers ->
- **Reassure**, rather than patronize
- Convey **benefits** of engaging in forums, and of working with peers -> **realistic** encouragement ->
- **.understanding** of the **challenges** for students.

Our online forum: a safe place to share

I understand and appreciate that for some of you, the very thought of posting on this forum may be a bit scary. It's perfectly ok to be nervous about posting ideas, and thoughts, to those you see as strangers on an online forum. But, it is important to understand at this early stage that you are all experiencing very similar things and so I'd urge you to see this online forum as a safe place to share with each other as a group.....

EMAIL james.roy@open.ac.uk for a copy of **Advice for online tutors about working with forums**'.

THANK YOU!
Enjoy
the rest of this
Conference & your time
in Dublin!



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