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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For guidance on citations see FAQs.

Version: Version of Record

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Think again! Transformative online pedagogy and the student who says ‘I am uncomfortable communicating with unknown people online’ ....?
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 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’
A KEY Conclusion about HOW to ‘do’ asynchronous tuition online

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

...
OpenLearn course planned – for 2020 …

OpenLearn ->
- launched in 2006
- around 60 million visitors since then.
- URL is: [www.open.edu/openlearn](http://www.open.edu/openlearn) OR at: [www.openlearn.com](http://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](mailto: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!