



What structures most impact a sense of belonging in an asynchronous online learning environment with a specific focus on discussion question formats?

environment with a specific focus on discussion question formats?

Dr. Jennifer Vogler, Assistant Professor

Department of Education, University of Wisconsin-Superior

Introduction

The asynchronous online learning environment has become a cornerstone for remote education as the educational landscape evolves. This presentation delves into the critical exploration of structures that most significantly influence a sense of belonging in this dynamic setting, specifically emphasizing the role of discussion question formats. Developing a Sense of Belonging, a key determinant of student engagement and success, is particularly challenging to cultivate in the absence of face-to-face interactions.

Goal of the Research Project

This project aimed to equip educators with actionable insights to enhance the online learning experience by unraveling the intricacies of discussion question formats and their influence on creating a sense of belonging. As education embraces digital transformation, understanding and implementing effective strategies for fostering a sense of belonging in asynchronous online environments becomes imperative for student success.

Methods

- Researcher collected 17 out of 36 responses to seven open-ended questions from students about their experiences with feeling a sense of belonging in asynchronous learning environments
- Student responses on the Qualtrics Survey link were anonymous via not having any identifiers on the survey
- Researcher analyzed responses to questions to identify themes or patterns that could be used to enhance the sense of belonging in asynchronous learning environments

Results

Engaging Conversation between Classmates and Professor

- Facilitate open and inclusive communication.
- Use multimedia for varied content delivery.
- Collaborative Engagement with Classmates and Professor

Construct Meaning

- Encourage active participation in discussions.
- Foster critical thinking and application of knowledge.
- Provide opportunities for self-reflection.
- Peer feedback and support.

Real World Experiences

- Incorporate practical applications of concepts
- Encourage diverse perspectives and opinions.

Build Life Long Connections

- Promote networking opportunities.

Discussion

- The way professors engage with students in online courses impacts student perceptions of belonging. This study focused on instructional strategies used in discussion forums to develop a sense of belonging for students in asynchronous learning environments.
- The professor's collaborative engagement in the discussion forum is key to enhancing students' sense of belonging in the course.
- Professors must acknowledge and understand students' diverse backgrounds and experiences to create culturally responsive classrooms and a sense of belonging in asynchronous environments. As my research indicates, when professors actively engage in discussion forums, learners feel valued and have a voice.

Reflection-Future Research

- When professors and students engage in meaningful discussions, a sense of belonging is created in asynchronous learning environments. Students benefit from discussion prompts that encourage personal reflection and application, which builds a sense of community in online courses. This sense of community encourages involvement and a safe place for sharing experiences and diverse opinions.
- It would be interesting to conduct a study that compares the sense of belonging created in video versus written discussion forums.

Acknowledgements & References

I am grateful to the Wisconsin Teaching Fellows & Scholars program and University Systems for this opportunity and support for my research.

Artze-Vega, I, Darby, F., Dewsbury, B., & Imad, M. (2023). *The Norton Guide to Equity-Minded Teaching*. W.W. Norton & Company.