Designing for Transformative Learning: Your Online Course
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"Critical reflection is the means by which we work through beliefs and assumptions, assessing their validity in the light of new experiences or knowledge, considering their sources, and examining underlying premises. It helps to talk to others, exchanging opinions and ideas, receiving support and encouragement, and engaging in discourse where alternatives are seriously weighed and evidence brought forth."

(Cranton, 2002, p.65)

Mezirow's 10 Steps of Transformative Learning:

1. Experiencing a disorienting dilemma
2. Feelings of fear, anger, guilt, and shame
3. Questioning one's assumptions
4. Recognizing the need for personal transformation
5. Exploring new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquiring new knowledge and skills
8. Provisional trying of new roles
9. Building confidence in new roles and relationships
10. A re-integration of a new perspective into one's life

Two critical components in transformative learning are discussion and reflection, both of which are well suited for an online learning environment.

Discussion

Generally, much of the interaction online is done in the discussion board. Although designing fruitful discussions can be challenging, there are multiple strategies that can be used to create deeper and more meaningful conversations in these forums that can lead to transformation. The discussion board can also be used for role plays and collaborative activities, which can encourage the "exploring of new roles, relationships and actions" as well as "acquiring new knowledge and skills."

Reflection

Reflection is critical to transformative learning and the online environment is the perfect place for which this can occur. The very nature of the asynchronous learning environment encourages more reflection and can provide opportunities for students to move through reflection and learning activities at their own pace, which will allow more space for transformation to occur. The use of blogs can allow for both private and public reflection. A private blog can serve as a reflection journal throughout the semester, and if it is public, the conversation can extend to other students or the instructor.

Design Tips

Creating Safe Space

- Set ground rules for sharing

- Start discussions early—with introductions, start with easy topics and move to harder

- Self-disclose: model for students the kind of responses you would like to see

Online Discussions

Initial Design:

- Design discussions around interesting topics

- Make them relevant & personal

- Develop good questions (Why, Imagine, If, Predict, Create, Defend, Think)

- Clear expectations & instructions

- Allow for creativity (Video, Infographic, Art, Voice)

- Offer options

Facilitation
(Opportunity to guide and engage learners):

- Positive feedback

- Make connections

- Follow up questions

- Summarize

Evaluation:

- Create clear rubrics or expectations

- High quality feedback often

- Peers can do it with help (Practice, Modeling)

Reflections

- Tools: Dropbox, Google Docs, Blogs, ePortfolios

- Follow design guidelines listed for discussion (good prompts, informal structure)

- Let students decide if reflections will be public or private

- Feedback from faculty or from peers (in small groups) can help encourage examination of assumptions.

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