

**SpringerBriefs in Education**

Open and Distance Education

Dianne Forbes · Nicola Daly · Liang Li

# Designing Discussion for Online and Blended Courses

A Forum for Learning in  
Higher Education

SpringerBriefs in Education

## **Open and Distance Education**

### **Series Editors**

Olaf Zawacki-Richter, University of Oldenburg, Oldenburg, Niedersachsen, Germany

Junhong Xiao, Shantou Radio & Television University, Shantou, Guangdong, China

### **Editorial Board**

Trisha Craig, Yale-NUS College, Singapore, Singapore

Ursula Glunk, University College Freiburg, University of Freiburg, Freiburg im Breisgau, Baden-Württemberg, Germany

You Guo Jiang, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA, USA

Rui Yang, Faculty of Education, University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Akiyoshi Yonezawa, Tohoku University, Sendai, Japan

Developing human capital through education and training is crucial to social and economic progress. However despite efforts to achieve equity and learning opportunities for all, resource constraints and lack of knowledge and skills can overwhelm the capability of government and non-government agencies, institutions and teachers to provide the required levels of education and training by conventional means. More and more providers are recognising that open, distance and online means of delivery have an important role to play both in providing formal schooling and tertiary education and informal and nonformal education and training for the countless millions wishing to upgrade their skills, knowledge and competences at anytime, anywhere at their own pace, and thus making the lifelong learning for all agenda a reality. This book series examines ways in which open and distance education can empower and enable individuals, groups and even entire communities to develop the knowledge and skills necessary for life and work in the 21st century, help to reduce poverty and inequality, achieve independent and sustainable development and meet the demands of the 21st century knowledge economies and open societies.

The books in this series are designed for all policy-makers, planners, managers, teachers and trainers, researchers, and students who are involved in or interested in applying open, distance and e-learning methods and technologies in informal and nonformal lifelong learning; schooling; technical and vocational education and training; higher education; workplace training and professional development; community development and international aid programmes; and serving the needs of minority groups, the disabled and other disadvantaged persons. They combine an up-to-date overview of theories, issues, core concepts and/or key literature in a particular field with case studies and practical advice in ways that will meet the needs of busy practitioners and researchers. They address such issues as access and equity, distance teaching and learning, learner support and guidance, costing, technology, assessment and learning analytics, quality assurance and evaluating outputs, outcomes and impacts, cultural factors, learning pathways and credit banking, accreditation, leadership, management, policy-making, and professional development for organisational renewal and change.

Researchers interested in authoring or editing a book for this series are invited to contact the Series Publishing Editor: [alice.xie@springernature.com](mailto:alice.xie@springernature.com)

All proposals will be sent out for external double-blind review. Review reports will be shared with proposers and their revisions will be further taken into consideration. The completed manuscript will be reviewed by the Series Editors and editorial advisors to ensure the quality of the book and also seek external review in order to ensure quality before formal publication.

**Abstracted/Indexed in:**


Scopus

Dianne Forbes · Nicola Daly · Liang Li

# Designing Discussion for Online and Blended Courses

A Forum for Learning in Higher Education

 Springer

Dianne Forbes   
Division of Education  
University of Waikato  
Hamilton, New Zealand

Nicola Daly  
Division of Education  
University of Waikato  
Hamilton, New Zealand

Liang Li  
School of Arts and Education  
University of Waikato  
Hamilton, New Zealand

ISSN 2211-1921                      ISSN 2211-193X (electronic)  
SpringerBriefs in Education  
ISSN 2509-4335                      ISSN 2509-4343 (electronic)  
SpringerBriefs in Open and Distance Education  
ISBN 978-981-97-6195-1            ISBN 978-981-97-6196-8 (eBook)  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-97-6196-8>

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd. 2024

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.

The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

This Springer imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd. The registered company address is: 152 Beach Road, #21-01/04 Gateway East, Singapore 189721, Singapore

If disposing of this product, please recycle the paper.

# **Acknowledgements**

We would like to acknowledge the contribution of Anna Juby, Research Assistant Extraordinaire, who helped with literature searches and gathering of anecdotes from online learners. This research assistance was funded by the University of Waikato, Division of Education Strategic Research Fund. We also want to acknowledge the many students who contributed to our research and teaching adventures.

# Contents

<b>1 Introduction—The Place of Online Discussion in Higher Education</b> .....	1
1.1 Learning Through Discussion: Dialogic Education and the Dialogic Space .....	4
1.2 What Is Different About Discussions in Online Learning Environments? .....	5
1.3 Is AOD Still Relevant? .....	5
1.4 Advantages and Possibilities .....	6
1.5 Actualising Affordances: Is There a Gap Between Actual and Potential AOD? .....	8
References .....	11
<b>2 Designing for Diversity</b> .....	13
2.1 Level of Study and Geographic Location .....	15
2.2 Student Heterogeneity .....	16
2.3 Return to Vignette .....	20
2.4 Takeaway Tips .....	20
References .....	22
<b>3 Effective Learning Through Online Discussion—Enhancing Student Strategies and Experience</b> .....	25
3.1 Understand the Purpose of Discussion .....	26
3.2 Develop Fluency in the Language of Discussion .....	27
3.3 Manage Time and Self .....	29
3.4 Add Value to the Discussion .....	30
3.5 Actively Seek Feedback .....	31
3.6 Take Safe Risks .....	32
3.7 Challenge Politely .....	32
3.8 What You Are Expected to Do in Discussion .....	33
3.9 What You Should Avoid Doing—According to Feedback from Students .....	33

3.10 What to Expect from Your Teachers in Our Online Discussions ... 34

3.11 Scenario... Some Time Later ..... 35

References ..... 35

**4 Effective Teaching Through Online Discussion—Enhancing Pedagogy and Practice ..... 37**

4.1 Discussion Starter ..... 38

    4.1.1 Discussion Topic ..... 38

    4.1.2 Discussion Type ..... 39

4.2 Discussion Intervention ..... 41

    4.2.1 Maintaining Momentum with the use of Questions ..... 41

    4.2.2 Acknowledging Students’ Contributions ..... 42

    4.2.3 Correcting Students’ Posts ..... 42

    4.2.4 Sharing New Information Including Resources, Experiences, and Opinions ..... 43

    4.2.5 Summarising Key Points During the Discussion ..... 43

    4.2.6 Modelling and Providing Guidance for Discussion ..... 43

4.3 Discussion Conclusion ..... 44

4.4 Variables Contributing to the Success of Online Discussion ..... 44

    4.4.1 Group Size ..... 45

    4.4.2 Frequency of Teacher Posts ..... 46

    4.4.3 Teacher Workload ..... 47

4.5 Return to Vignette ..... 48

4.6 Takeaway Tips ..... 48

References ..... 49

**5 Assessment Issues and Practices ..... 51**

5.1 Learning and Assessment ..... 52

5.2 Grading for Attendance and Participation ..... 53

5.3 Assessment for Summative Purposes ..... 55

5.4 Formative—Summative Tensions ..... 57

5.5 Takeaway Tips ..... 59

References ..... 59

**6 Innovative Practices in Online Discussion ..... 61**

6.1 Content of Online Discussion ..... 61

6.2 Involvement of Discussion Participants ..... 64

    6.2.1 Student Roles ..... 64

    6.2.2 Guest Lecturers and Stakeholders ..... 67

6.3 Use of Diverse Tools ..... 68

6.4 Return to Vignette ..... 71

6.5 Takeaway Tips ..... 71

References ..... 72

**7 The Future of Online Discussion ..... 75**

7.1 Ideas for Future Directions ..... 77

References ..... 78