

Dialogue Intensive Learning

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Discussion Element in Online Classes

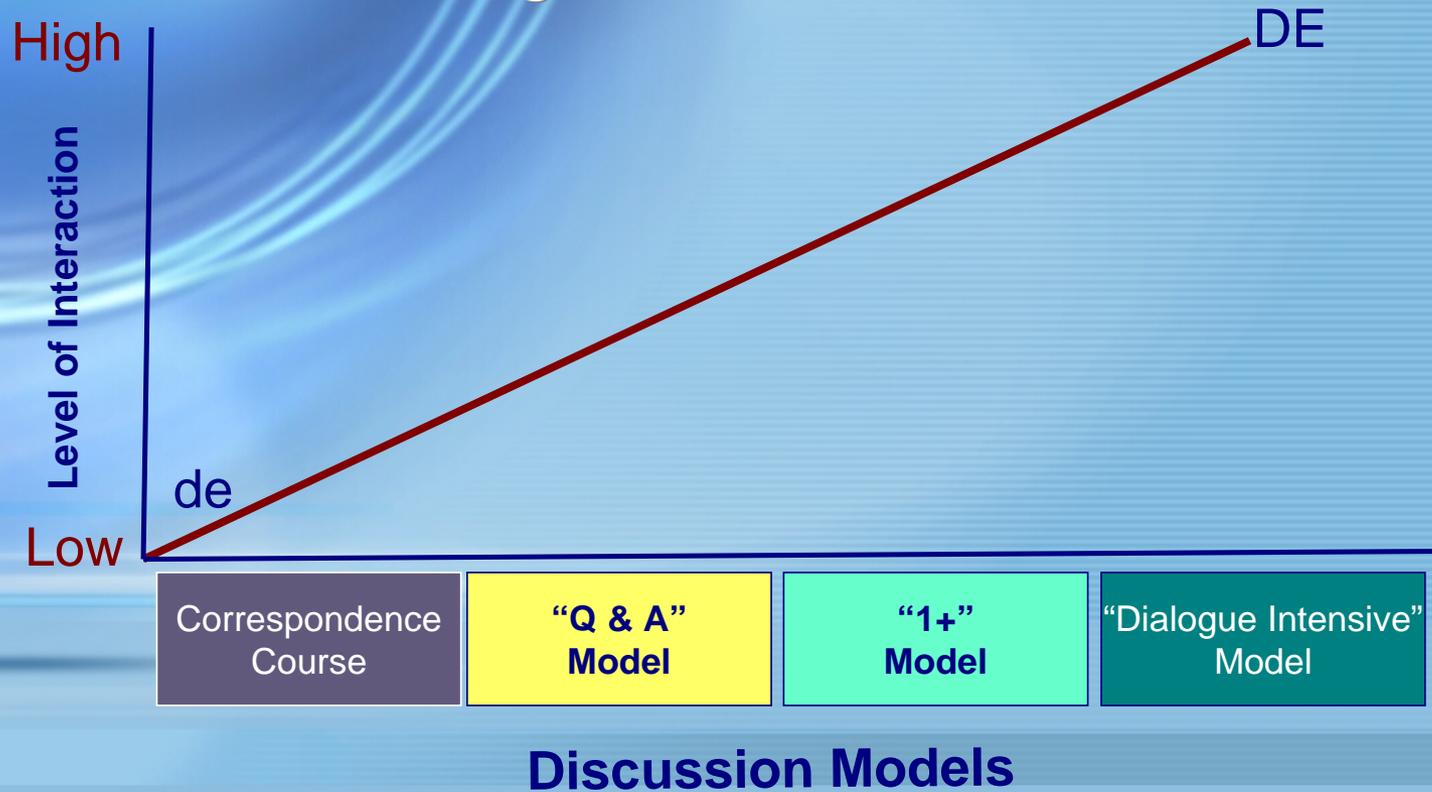
- “Classroom” for instructor-student and student-student interaction.
- Interaction can significantly exceed on-campus, class interaction.
- “Rich source of learning and enjoyment...” (Rossman, 1999).

Discussion Element in Online Classes

“The depth and frequency of intellectual exchange with your classmates exceeds that of traditional graduate school experiences. My learning team colleagues brought a wealth of experience from the private and public sector to our online discussions - which were much more lively than the traditional lecture-format learning environment.”

Online Student, 2006

Distance Education Interactivity



Not All Discussion Models are Created Equal

- “Q&A” Model
- “1+” Model
- “Dialogue Intensive” Model

“Q&A” Model

- **Structured discussion environment**
 - Specific student response tasks
- **Instructor posted question**
 - Students post a single response
- **Little instructor-student or student-student interaction**
- **Primary value - sharing approaches and perspectives in response to the posted question.**

"1+" Model

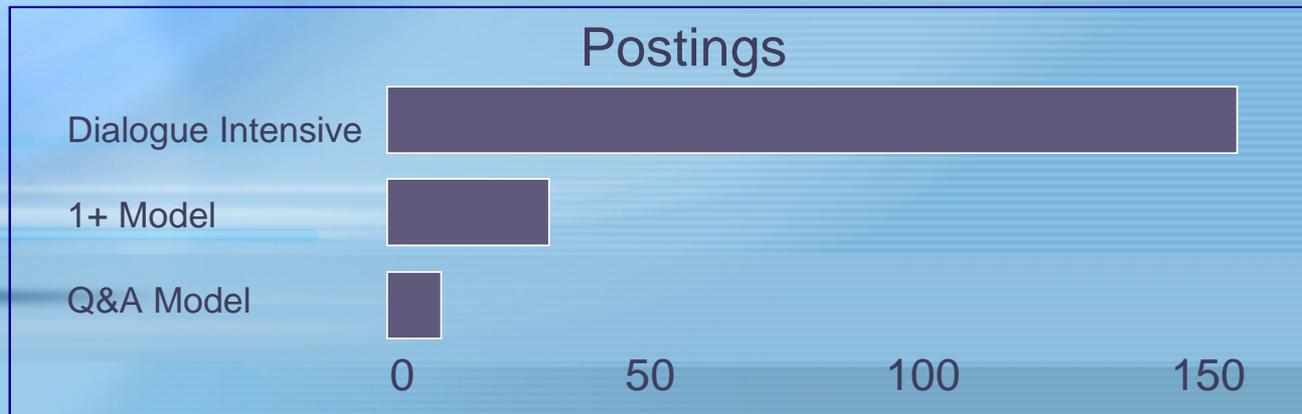
- Limited interactive model
- Students respond to the posted discussion question and to one of their peer's postings
- Some promise for interaction but it depends on the instructor's engagement

Dialogue Intensive Model

- Learning occurs with active instructor-student and student-student interaction
- Initial discussion question sets the foundation
- Instructor and student interaction extends the discussion
 - Sharing of professional experiences, personal insights and other research materials

Interaction Level

- **Assumptions:**
 - 10 student online class
 - Discussion Unit - 1 week
 - Typical expectations of the models:



Student Feedback as a Metric

- Student comments in course evaluations
 - Approximately 80 students from each model
 - Comments on the discussions:
 - Dialogue intensive - 67%
 - 1+ - 29%
 - Q&A - 17%
 - Tone and content of the discussion feedback
 - Dialogue intensive - 87% positive
 - 1+ and Q&A - mixed

Dialogue Intensive Feedback

“The seminars were exciting, educational and filled with ‘real-world’ situations. Everyone, regardless of experience, was able to contribute to the learning team discussions. I became ‘addicted’ to the discussion experience really fast. It was exciting to read everyone’s e-mail postings and understand how corporate and government agencies work. I am able to incorporate many of the lessons learned in my current position.”

Online Student, 2005

“My learning team included professionals from the nuclear power field, healthcare, industry, human services, education, and manufacturing. Thanks to insight from these outstanding professionals, coupled with the intense, fast-paced curriculum, I now approach problems from a more strategic perspective and with greater global insight than ever before.”

Online Student, 2006

Framing the Dialogue Intensive Model

- **Setting expectations**
 - The course syllabus
 - The “grade weight” of discussions
 - 20-30% of final grade
 - Grade each discussion unit
 - Balance between “knowing and doing”
 - Knowing - course or other source materials
 - Doing - examples from professional experiences
 - Discussion etiquette
 - Tone, language, respect for the discussion area
 - Quality and quantity metrics
 - Posting rubric

Posting Rubric / Discussion Metrics

- Provide clear expectations and grading criteria for “quantity”
 - Minimum expectations for postings in the discussion “unit”
 - Be specific about days of participation
 - “7 postings over 4 days of the discussion week”
 - Be specific about too few and too many postings
 - Provide grading scale

Posting Rubric / Discussion Metrics

A quality rubric for the initial posting could be:

“Profile of a Good Post”

- **“A quality posting has several characteristics. It is germane, succinct and clear, ideally less than 150 words. It refers to the course material in an appropriate manner and also may make use of relevant outside material. It’s main point or thesis is further supported by an example or experience that helps translate the application of the material. It adds or extends the discussion.**

- **In responding to your peers, “I agree” or “You are wonderful” type postings are good for class morale but do not really extend our learning experience. It will add to our learning experience if your responses to your peers either illuminate their point further, raise an additional question, offer insight from relevant personal experience or brings in other pertinent sources” (Dool, 2007).**

Creating the Right Climate

- **The “right” discussion questions**
 - **Engenders different approaches and allows room for extension**
 - Does not call for a specific answer
 - **Aligns with the course or unit objectives**
 - **Encourages the student to bring in professional experiences and other materials to expand the discussion**

Creating the Right Climate

- **Active instructor engagement**
 - Source of energy and boundary control
 - “Bookends” the course
 - Discussion introduction
 - Summary postings
 - Actively guides the discussion 5-6 days during the discussion “unit” (e.g. week)
 - Sets the example
 - Promotes interaction

Creating the Right Climate

- Instructor discussion “styles”
 - Many instructors have a personal favorite style
- Mixing up “styles” will promote discussions
 - “Socratic” style
 - Questions used to promote deeper thought and more interaction
 - “Expert” style
 - Examples, scenarios, or practices
 - Learn it and apply it
 - “Devil’s Advocate”
 - “Yes, but have you thought of this...”

Creating the Right Climate

- **The issue of “superficiality”**
 - **Undermines the discussion and frustrates the more active, engaged students**
 - Stating the obvious
 - “You’re wonderful...”
 - “I agree...”
 - **Shifting instructor styles and direct interaction will create deeper reflection**
 - “Taking your point a bit further...”
 - “OK, what would you do in this situation..”

Student Behaviors

- **“The Invisible Man”**
 - Tries to hide
- **“Jane come lately”**
 - Posts madly in the last 2 days or after discussion unit ends
- **Devils Advocate**
 - Fine in normal doses, annoying if overdone
- **“The Contrarian”**
 - Fine in small doses, disruptive if overdone
- **“You’re wonderful, I could not agree more”**
 - Good for morale but adds little discussion value
- **The Dominator**
 - Overachiever, dominates the discussion by sheer volume
- **The Egotist**
 - Always right, challenging them is seen as an “affront”
- **The “Therapy Seeker”**
 - Discussions are not the therapy couch

Instructor Roles

- **Facilitator**
 - Source of energy
- **Boundary Setter**
 - Keep on track without undermining engagement level
- **Traffic Cop**
 - Regulates traffic flow
 - Not too little or too much
- **Chief Cheerleader**
 - Praise in public, critique in private

A CEO, Nun and Rabbi...

- Unique opportunity to share experiences and perspectives
- Palloff and Pratt (1999) - "it is the relationships and interactions among people through which knowledge is primarily generated"
- Discussions are a "living" organism and need energy and nurturing
- Deeper and richer learning experience
 - *"I have done both traditional and online programs and I found the communication and sharing of ideas to be greater and more effective in this particular online program" (dialogue intensive model).*

Online Graduate Student, 2006

References

- Dool, R. (2007). Course syllabus, Multiculturalism and Leadership: Communication perspectives. Seton Hall University, Spring 2007.
- Palloff, R. & Pratt, K. (1999). Building learner communities in cyberspace: Effective strategies for the online classroom. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Rossman, M. (1999). Successful online teaching using an asynchronous learner discussion forum. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 3(2).