

Using an Online Course on “Hate” to Teach Students to Know Self First, Then Other

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Abstract

We have been using an online format to teach a course on the Politics and Psychology of Hatred for over 12 years. In that time, we have analyzed and critiqued most elements of the course and tools for online teaching. It is our belief that a critical and repetitive self-analysis is necessary before students can truly begin to acknowledge and appreciate others. We also believe that online teaching and our goal of self-exploration before “other analysis” are a perfect match. In other words, online teaching platforms offer a wealth of methods by which faculty can incorporate a self-reflection framework into the teaching and learning. This “marriage” of online teaching tools and critical self-analysis pedagogy eliminates, in our opinion, many of the concerns and difficulties faculty (and students) encounter in online courses.

How the “Other” Looks from the Disciplinary Perspective of the Course

When we set out to construct our online course on prejudice, discrimination and hate, we knew that some variation of a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) pedagogy would be needed. We could not expect students to truly grapple with the issues of prejudice, discrimination and hate, without a critical questioning and answering methodology. Otherwise we would, as one of our colleagues put it, “simply teach them how to hate.” In looking over definitions of SoTL that we could adopt, we decided upon the Hutchings and Shulman (1999) definition that SoTL is a method of teaching based in a process of critical questioning and answering. Unless one is teaching a small seminar style course or a special topics course, however, it can be quite difficult within the realities of the face-to-face classroom or lecture hall to truly promote and maintain an atmosphere of critical questioning and answering. But online teaching platforms offer the perfect opportunity to construct courses in such a way that critical questioning and answering IS the norm.

Osborne and his colleagues (Osborne, Kriese, Tobey & Johnson, 2009a & 2009b), discussed how they have used a critical thinking framework to design and teach an online course on hatred using a SoTL model. In this work, it was discovered that students who were rated (by independent raters) as demonstrating the most progress on the SoTL model of critical questioning and answering, also demonstrated the most change in interpersonal relationship skills in an online classroom. In our classroom, the “Other” looks like “Self.” We do not “allow” students to simply search for prejudice, discrimination and hate by pointing outward and looking at others. We require them to look at self over and over and then compare what they are learning about self to others. In order to enhance the likelihood that this self-exploration would result in the kinds of self-knowing that would prepare students to be appropriately positioned to look at “others,” however, we knew we needed a well-defined model for self-exploration. Before providing details on the assignments we use to promote this self-analysis, let us first look at course goals and the course syllabus.

Description of Course Goals as they relate to Promoting an Understanding of “Others”

We use the following course and learning objectives for our course. These are based on the campus learning objectives that had been developed and adopted by Indiana University East at the time that we both taught there. We have found them to be such an effective method for “positioning” this course in the minds of students, that we still use this framework.

Course Learning Objectives

We believe that educated persons should achieve seven learning objectives as a result of acquiring a college education. These achievement goals are:

1. Educated persons should be exposed to a broad variety of academic fields traditionally known as the Liberal Arts (humanities, fine arts, social sciences, natural sciences) in order to develop a critical appreciation of a diversity of ideas and creative expression.
2. Educated persons should have achieved depth in some field of knowledge. A sequential accumulation of knowledge and skills in an academic discipline is essential for a focused personal and professional development.
3. Educated persons should be able to express themselves clearly, completely, and accurately. Effective communication entails sharing ideas through a variety of techniques, including reading, writing, speaking and technology.
4. Educated persons should be able to relate computational skills to all fields so that they are able to think with numbers. At a minimum, students should be able to carry out basic arithmetical and algebraic functions; they should have a working concept of simple statistics; and they should be able to interpret and use data in various forms.
5. Educated persons should have the ability to develop informed opinions, to comprehend, formulate, and critically evaluate ideas, and to identify problems and find solutions to those problems. Effective problem solving involves a variety of skills including research, analysis, interpretation, and creativity.
6. Educated persons should develop the skills to understand, accept, and relate to people of different backgrounds and beliefs. In a pluralistic world one should not be provincial or ignorant of other cultures; one's life is experienced within the context of other races, religions, languages, nationalities, and value systems.
7. Educated persons should be expected to have some understanding of and experience in thinking about moral and ethical problems. A significant quality in educated persons is the ability to question and clarify personal and cultural values, and thus to be able to make discriminating moral and ethical choices.

Of course no single class could accomplish all of these goals. This course is specifically designed to enhance your skills and abilities in achieving learning goals numbers 2, 3, 5, 6, & 7.

Course Learning Objectives

There are key concepts you will learn in this course. As time permits throughout the semester, we will work to reinforce these objectives. By the end of the semester, students should be able to provide well thought out, clear, and complete answers to the following questions:

- 1.) What are the primary causes of hate?
- 2.) Where, How and Why do I Hate?
- 3.) What political processes create, perpetuate or magnify hatred?
- 4.) What psychological principles create, perpetuate or magnify hatred?
- 5.) How can hatred be countered?
- 6.) How are personal attitudes, group identity and international terrorism linked?
- 7.) Where, How and Why do Others Hate?

As you can see from these campus and course learning objectives, we focus on self as a methodology for truly understanding others. In order to facilitate this self-other connection, we also employ a critical thought model that was developed using Kuhn's (1999) "meta-knowing" process and Smith's (2002) characteristics of critical thinking. We turn to these elements before further exploring course assignments that facilitate the critical thought process we believe is essential for assisting students in knowing others by first knowing self.

We believe one of the primary reasons that online classrooms can prompt the kinds of critical self-change that we sought is because they provide tools that can be more easily developed to structure the course in such a way that Kuhn's (1999) "meta-knowing" critical thinking competencies are modeled and reinforced in comparison to traditional classrooms. This is not to say, of course, that ALL online courses accomplish this. Our point is simply that online courses CAN accomplish this AND can do so much more easily and effectively than typical face-to-face courses if they are constructed correctly. Before discussing, then, our opinions of what "tools" need to be used in online teaching to foster such "meta-knowing," let us explore what Kuhn means by use of this concept.

As already mentioned, Kuhn (1999) makes the basic assumption that critical thinking is a process of learning and demonstrating cognitive competencies that he defined as “meta-knowing.” Rather than first-order knowing skills that involve an awareness of the facts and opinions that one holds, meta-knowing (which Kuhn defined as involving “second-order” skills) involves an awareness of “how” one knows NOT “what” one knows. According to Kuhn, there are three categories of meta-knowing. We made a concerted effort, then, in the design of our online course to utilize the internet platform tools that we believed would come closest to fostering and reinforcing each of these categories. These categories are: (1) metastrategic, (2) metacognitive, and (3) epistemological.

With *metastrategic* knowing, one develops the ability to be aware of the thinking strategies one is choosing and using. In other words, students would be encouraged to ponder (1) what they know, and (2) how they know it. This moves the person away from passive thinking to active thinking. One is aware of one’s thinking while that thinking is occurring, not just once a decision has been made. Although we are sure that many faculty employ this strategy in all classrooms – from time to time – it is our belief that such encouragement is rare in the typical face-to-face classroom or lecture hall. In fact, when one is employed in the process of “lecturing,” there may be an implicit understanding between teacher and learner that students know “how” and “when” to think or, if they do not, the teacher will “tell” them.

According to Kuhn (1999), *metacognitive* knowing involves an awareness of how one is thinking and a clear understanding of the content of one’s thoughts. It is limited, however, to “fact” based information. Students should be able to “tell us what they know” not just “how they feel.” The first step involves being aware of one’s thinking processes and this second step involves an awareness of the “content” of one’s thinking. With these levels of meta-knowing, nothing is taken for granted. The unexplored becomes explored. It is not necessary, at this point, that the student be fully aware of the significance of that knowledge but they must actively explore that knowledge. The meta-knowing process, then, is more deliberate and active. In our opinion, a critical element of this step that connects directly to the critical questioning and learning process that is SoTL is to require students to acknowledge what aspect(s) of what they “know” are factual (true declarative knowledge) and what aspect(s) are based on opinion or feeling. We do NOT assume students will be able (or even know they should) separate opinion from fact unless they are told to do so, it is demonstrated “how” to do this, and they are held accountable for doing so (or not doing so).

At the highest level of meta-knowing, Kuhn (1999) suggests one develops *epistemological* knowing. This level of knowing involves a more connected and inclusive understanding of one’s knowledge and how that knowledge is similar to or different from what others “know.” According to Osborne, Kriese, Tobey and Johnson (2009a), “it involves an awareness of how people – in general – know this and how one – individually – knows it (p. 46).” Kuhn (1999) describes meta-knowing as developmental in nature. We take this to mean that it is an interactive process. It will not occur without effort. In other words, if we expect students to progress from metastrategic, to metacognitive and then to epistemological knowing, we must develop assignments and use pedagogical tools and strategies that require students to practice with this progression of critical thinking. “Critical thinking according to Kuhn (1999), then, will not happen by accident nor will it happen without experiences that require one to practice it” (Osborne et al, 2009a, p. 46).

We have based this work on the assumption that online teaching formats CAN be the perfect match for the critical questioning and answering process that is the hallmark of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. We have discussed how we have envisioned Kuhn’s (1999) critical thinking model as a SoTL framework that we use in our online courses. But, two things must occur in order for online teaching platforms and SoTL to match: (1) the online platform must have the tools available that promote the progression on the developmental continuum of “meta-knowing” that we just outlined, and (2) the faculty member MUST design the course in such a way as to utilize the tools and to demonstrate, foster, and hold students accountable for the degree to which they do or do not demonstrate such meta-knowing.

Sample Course Assignment(s) that Demonstrate how Critical Thinking is Facilitated

The assignments for the course are a blend of Discussions (usually responses to a prompt such as “what would tolerance for ambiguity” have to do with prejudice, discrimination and hate – which is preceded by students completing a tolerance for ambiguity measure), Individual Assignments (in which students complete work on their own and reflect in the discussion forum how that work fits into the course), and Group Assignments (that require students to work with others to reach consensus on issues **and** assess themselves in terms of their contributions to the group after each group assignment). A sample Individual Assignment is the Diversity Philosophy. Here is what students see in the syllabus:

1.) Individual Assignment 1 – “Diversity Philosophy”

- a. complete the diversity philosophy posted to the course site under this assignment
- b. score the diversity philosophy using the scoring rubric posted to the course site
- c. post a discussion on the discussion board answering the following questions about your score on this philosophy:

- * how does your score make you feel and why?
- * what do you think are the factors that are primarily responsible for your score? How are they responsible?
- * If you could change one thing about your score what would it be? Why?

An example of a Discussion Forum involves Testing Assumptions. Here is what is posted for students:

- 1.) go to the following URL and engage in the Testing Assumptions exercises listed (if the link does not open copy and paste the URL into your browser and it should work):

<http://philosophy.hku.hk/think/arg/hidden.php>

After having engaged in the exercises, respond to each of the following questions in your post to the forum:

- a.) what do you think is the most important thing you learned from doing these exercises?
- b.) how does the material in this article link to the assignment from last week - The Nuclear Shelter?
- c.) how could you use this information (from the article and what you learned from the assignment last week) to make changes in your own dealings with other people?

OR..

- 2.) Go to the URL listed below and read the article (if the link does not open copy and paste the URL into your browser and it should work):

<http://www.criticalthinking.org/articles/ct-distinguishing-inferencs.cfm>

After having read the article, respond to each of the following questions in your post to the forum:

- a.) what do you think is the most important thing you learned from reading this article? Why?
- b.) how does the material in this article link to the assignment from last week - The Nuclear Shelter?
- c.) how could you use this information (from the article and what you learned from the assignment last week) to make changes in your own dealings with other people?

An example of a Group Assignment is the Middle Class Mentality Assignment. Here is what is presented in the syllabus:

1.) Group Assignment 1- Middle Class Mentality

Work together in the Chatroom designated for your group number. Your goals are:

- a. get to know each other, decide on a group name and use that name in ALL group posts and in all group assignments,
- b. reach consensus on how to define "**Middle Class Mentality.**"
- c. post that group definition to the discussion list. In your response, be sure and include answers to the following questions:

- * can anyone "become" middle class? Why or why not?
- * what all different aspects of society does the middle class mentality permeate?
- * how is the concept of middle class mentality linked to psychological issues such as (1) social comparison, (2) optimal distinctiveness, and (3) self-perception theory?

Note: you will need to look these three terms up (an Internet search will reveal lots of resources and most any social psychology textbook covers these), include a brief discussion of each of these theories into your post, and link your definition to those terms.

Because a primary focus in the course is on requiring students to draw connections between themselves and others, they must complete a Group Work Self-Assessment after each group assignment. This is included for two reasons. First, we want to promote more effective Group Work and we believe self-analysis and accountability (the completed self-assessments are posted in a forum for all the class to see). Second, we continually want students to think about the connections between themselves (who they are, what they believe, how they act, etc.) and others. The self-assessment that we use (insert reference) is included below:

Group Work - Self-Diagnosis

Each of the following seven statements describes an action related to group effectiveness. For each statement mark:

- 5= I always behave (or behaved) that way
- 4 = I frequently behave (or behaved) that way
- 3 = I occasionally behave (or behaved) that way
- 2 = I seldom behave (or behaved) that way
- 1 = I never behave (or behaved) that way

When I am a Member of A Group:

1. I clarify the group's goals and ensure that the goals are formulated so that members "sink or swim" together and are committed to achieving them.
2. I facilitate communication by modeling good sending and receiving skills and ensuring that communication among all group members is distributed and two-way.
3. I provide leadership by taking whatever action is needed to help the group achieve its goals and maintain good working relationships among members, and I encourage all other members to do the same.
4. I use my expertise and knowledge to influence the other group members to increase their efforts to achieve mutual goals, and I let myself be influenced by other members who are knowledgeable and have relevant expertise.
5. I suggest different ways of making decisions (such as majority vote or consensus), depending on the (a) availability of time and resources, (b) size and seriousness of the decision, and (c) amount of member commitment to implement the decision.
6. I advocate my views and challenge the views of others in order to create high- quality and creative decisions.
7. I face my conflicts with other group members and present the conflicts as problems to be jointly solved. If we are unable to do so, I ask other group members to help us resolve the conflicts constructively.

Total Score

Sample elements from course syllabi as they relate to the critical thinking process

Several elements from the course (and included in the syllabus) relate directly to this self-other connection that we have been discussing. We require students to explore self many times and in many ways. Additionally, however, we also require students to work in groups and have a very clear set of expectations for how they will interact with each other. To illustrate, we include below the exact “model for critical thinking” that we include in our syllabus and the exact “course etiquette” that we include to guide student interactions with each other.

A Model for Critical Thinking

We expect students to demonstrate a significant amount of critical thinking in this course. Because this is so important, we have developed and outline below a model that you should use as you complete course assignments. Specifically, we believe that critical thinkers demonstrate the ability to address issues at each of the following levels:

- 1.) **Recitation** – state known facts or opinions. A critical component of this step is to acknowledge what aspect(s) of what is being stated is factual and what is based on opinion.
- 2.) **Exploration** – analyze the roots of those opinions or facts. This step requires digging below the surface of what is believed or known and working to discover the elements that have combined to result in that fact or that opinion. This is an initial analysis without an attempt to comprehend the impact of those facts or opinions.
- 3.) **Understanding** – involves an awareness of other views and a comprehension of the difference(s) between one’s own opinion (and the facts or other opinions upon which that opinion is based) and the opinions of others. To truly “understand” our own opinion in relationship to others, we must initiate an active dialogue with the other person about his or her opinions and the roots of those opinions. In other words, once we become aware of the roots of our own opinions, we must understand the roots of the opinions of others.
- 4.) **Appreciation** – means a full awareness of the differences between our views and opinions and those of others. To truly appreciate differences, we must be aware of the nature of those differences. The active dialogue undertaken in the third step (understanding) should lead to an analysis of the opinion as recited by the other. The result should be a complete awareness of the similarities and differences between our own opinions (and the roots of those opinions) and those of the “other.” Although we may still be aware that our opinions differ, we are now in a position to truly appreciate and value those differences.

In our view, it is important to acknowledge that “understanding” does not mean to “accept.” The goal is not to get everyone to agree; the goal is to get people to truly explore and understand how and why opinions differ. To understand means to realize the circumstances and motivations that lead to difference and to realize that those differences are meaningful. It is our belief that discussing social issues (such as prejudice or racism) without requiring students to explore the roots of their views, to understand the roots of other views, and to appreciate the nature and importance of different views about those issues, perpetuates ignorance. To raise the issue without using the elements of critical thinking and exploration we have outlined above may simply reinforce prejudices by giving them voice without question.

Course Etiquette and Participating in an Internet Course

This is an Internet course. As such, the success of the course relies on active participation by each class member throughout the entire semester.

Even though we are the professors for the course, it is designed as a seminar course, meaning active participation from students is essential.

Although face-to-face interactions will not occur because of our use of the Internet, we do expect continual communication between members of the class and the course faculty. Even though this interaction will be over the Internet, we expect students to use the same etiquette that would be used in a classroom during face-to-face interactions. This etiquette includes:

- 1.) Respect for others (their viewpoints, their values, their beliefs),
- 2.) The right to disagree (but requires sensitivity to the viewpoints of others),
- 3.) Taking responsibility for being involved in developing the issues and topics relevant to this course,
- 4.) Active participation in all elements of the course,
- 5.) Continual feedback to the instructors about the course, course assignments, and individual viewpoints,
- 6.) A commitment to the mutual exchange of ideas. This means we will not isolate definitive "answers" to the issues we raise but we will actively explore and respect the multiple sides to those issues, and
- 7.) A responsibility to "police" ourselves. We are attempting to develop a community and this requires trust. In order to develop trust, we must know that we can share our ideas and not be "attacked." This also requires that we allow other class members the same trust and freedom we expect.

Evidence that the efforts made in this course ARE promoting understanding of others

Evidence for the effectiveness of our efforts have been outlined in several publications (e.g., Osborne, Kriese, Tobey & Johnson, 2009a; Osborne, Kriese & Tobey, 2008). We reprint (with permission) elements of those publications below. In the *Insight Journal, Volume 3* we note:

It is our belief that a reflective piece, such as this, is of value for those who are new to SoTL and for providing potentially new ways of doing things to those who have been utilizing SoTL for some time. But, as we believe is always the case, the students can say it best. In closing then, we leave the reader with another sampling of student comments that we believe illustrate the additive value of incorporating a SoTL approach in the classroom.

"I am glad this course forces us to argue for the need for value added, civically engaged education, and to utilize critical thinking to prompt exploration of hidden assumptions and biases." AF

"I agree with you, but I also feel some people need a place to start and need a forum like this to open up and explore the issues themselves and to be encouraged to think more critically before acting and instigating a movement without concrete ideas/opinions about a certain issue." WB

"I think what I have learned so far is that we have to agree to disagree. Not everyone is going to see things like you do. If that were the case we wouldn't have anything to talk about. I've also learned we have got to critically think about and evaluate what we are talking about. I've also learned to respect the fact that each of us have been raised with different values, beliefs and ideals of what is and isn't acceptable in society. Once we respect the fact that we are all different and don't see through the same set of eyes, then we can work on changing." IP

In the *Insight Journal, Volume 4*, we wrote:

Our project rested on the idea that the interpersonal skills learned in our course would enhance critical thinking and these advancements in critical thinking would surely show how students would learn content in future courses. The focus of this article, however, is *not* on student performance (grades) in future courses.

Our purpose here is to assess the logical but, heretofore, undocumented relationship between interpersonal skills and critical thinking discussed throughout the scholarship of teaching and learning literature, and to model a scholarship of teaching and learning inquiry framework for building a course.

Method

Two naïve raters went through the course postings from an entire semester of the internet-based, team-taught seminar course, “The Politics and Psychology of Hatred.” Nineteen students participated in the course from the beginning to the end of the semester. Student posts were “graded” by faculty but not assessed as part of this project until after course grades were submitted. The raters were asked to assess the course postings for each student (at the end of the semester) using the instruments shown in Appendices A and B. The raters were trained to use the scoring systems until the correlation between their scores for a random sample of postings pulled from the course reached $r=.90$. From this point on, the ratings of the two raters were averaged for each of the participants in the study.

As a reminder, our interest was in assessing the relationship between interpersonal skills (what we called “course etiquette”) and progress on the critical thinking model. For our purposes, a course posting that was assessed by raters as including “exploration” demonstrated a higher level of critical thinking than one that showed “recitation.” Our guiding question was: Are higher levels of critical thinking (moving upward through recitation, exploration, and understanding to appreciation) related to ratings of student use of the course etiquette (conceptualized by us as more effective demonstration of interpersonal skills)?

Students completed a weekly assignment (responding to a discussion forum “question of the week” that was linked to some current event dealing with prejudice, discrimination or hate), three individual assignments (larger scale assignments to be worked on and posted individually), three group assignments (larger scale assignments to be worked on and posted as part of a group – students stayed in the same groups all semester), and one course project that was completed with the same group as the group assignments.

Raters (and students at the beginning of the course) were given the following definitions to use in assessing course posts for levels of critical thinking: (1) *Recitation* – state known facts or opinions, (2) *Exploration* – analyze the roots of those opinions or facts, (3) *Understanding* – involves an awareness of other views and a comprehension of the difference(s) between one’s own opinion (and the facts or other opinions upon which that opinion is based) and the opinions of others, and (4) *Appreciation* – a full awareness of the differences between our views and opinions and those of others. To truly appreciate differences, we must be aware of the nature of those differences.

Results

Average rater scores were entered into a linear regression analysis using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 11.5. The regression analysis was run for each level of the critical thinking model adding in each rating on use of course etiquette to determine which elements of course etiquette weighted most heavily for each level of critical thinking. As expected, none of the levels of course etiquette weighted on *recitation* of fact and opinion, $F(3,8)= 2.105, p=.292$.

For *exploration*, several elements of course etiquette had significant beta weights and lead to an overall significance of $F(8,3) = 110.632, p=.001$. The course etiquette elements that weighted on exploration were respect, sensitivity, and mutual exchange of ideas. In terms of the third level of the critical thinking model, *understanding* views of others, again there was a significant overall effect of etiquette, $F(8,3) = 67.646, p=.003$, but the course etiquette item that weighted significantly was mutual exchange of ideas, $t=-3.667, p=.035$. Finally, there was a significant overall relationship between the highest level of critical thinking – *appreciation* of the views of others – and course etiquette, $F(8,3) = 908.845, p=.0001$ and the following individual elements of course etiquette weighted significantly with appreciation: (1) respect, (2) sensitivity, (3) active participation, (4) feedback to others, and (5) mutual exchange of ideas. Each of these were significant at the .05 level.

The above reprints from the *Insight Journal, Volumes 3 and 4*, outline qualitative (comments from students) and quantitative (statistical comparisons of use of the critical thought model and appropriate use of course etiquette) across multiple semesters of our course.

Although other measures have been gathered and more could be discussed, our goal was simply to provide a sampling of how we have endeavored to ensure that the emphasis on self-analysis that we include in our course is actually facilitating an awareness and appreciation of others in our students. We believe the brief evidence presented above illustrates that it does, indeed, foster this connection.

The Connection between this Course and Discourse on “Otherness”

The focus of this chapter is on “how” to teach a course that promotes an awareness of “other” by focusing on “self.” Although we believe this self-other connection transcends the classroom and has implications for how students navigate their social worlds, we do not document this nor is it our focus. Just like we cannot force students to apply the principles of our course in their daily lives – though many report specific examples of how they do - we cannot “force” faculty to design online courses so that they foster and promote meta-knowing. Indeed, Care and Scanlan (2001) suggest that many online courses and programs do not meet the criteria to be considered “pedagogically sound”.

Fortunately, there is useful guidance and advice for faculty on how to promote critical thinking and discussions in online courses. For example, MacKnight (2000, p. 39) offers advice for faculty by noting that faculty can support disciplined discussions by: (1) maintaining a focused discussion, (2) keeping the discussion intellectually responsible, (3) stimulating the discussion by asking probing questions that hold students accountable for their thinking, (4) infusing these questions in the minds of students, (5) encouraging full participation, and (6) periodically summarizing what has or needs to be done.

We do believe, however, that most online teaching platforms have pedagogical tools available that, if used wisely, can result in student progress in meta-knowing. As we conclude this essay, we discuss a few examples of the tools that we employ (and we utilize two different online teaching platforms depending on the semester and campus of origin as our course is team taught yet we live in different states and teach at different universities) in demonstrating, fostering, reinforcing and holding students accountable for demonstrating meta-knowing.

Discussion Forum

Discussion forums tend to be “threaded,” meaning that lines of conversation can be followed. One can use such forums to prompt questions and answers, or one can use such forums to provide a prompt and ask students to reply to that prompt and to reply to the replies of other students. In our minds, the most important elements here are that the discussion is: (1) posted for all to see, and (2) threaded such that each person who reads the posts benefits from reading the progression of thinking that has occurred. Unlike the comments made during a lecture, these are posted and can remain available for the entire semester. Reference can be made back to previous posts and students can be encouraged to reread their own earlier posts and note how their thinking might have changed.

Chatroom

A chatroom is just that – a place to chat. In our experience one of the richest elements of face-to-face teaching that is missing in most online courses is chatting. Consider, for example, those wonderful conversations that occur five to ten minutes before class or after class. As another example, consider the “aha” moments that often occur when a student is struggling with a course concept during an office hours conversation. These will not occur spontaneously in an online classroom unless some effort is made by the faculty member to provide a place for them to occur. We hold, for example, online office hours in our Office Chatroom. These discussions can be set to remain available for a given time so that others who did not come to those office hours could still read the conversations that occurred.

We also set up chatrooms for each group we have assigned in the course. This is very beneficial because we can follow their ongoing conversations and students sometimes invite us in to read through their “chats” and offer guidance and advice on how they are proceeding with a group project or group assignment. Again, because these are dated and can be archived – students can reread earlier conversations and note how their thinking is progressing.

Wiki/Blogs

Wikis and Blogs are newer features that most (we think) online course administration platforms are now using. They are similar to discussion forums in the sense that work can be “threaded” but Wikis add the beneficial feature where students can interactively work on documents.

In this sense, an assignment can become a “living” document where each person can see what the other has contributed and what each person has added, changed or recommends be deleted. Again, if the goal is to promote critical thinking and meta-knowing in a developmental sense, it is important that students always be able to “see” where their thinking has been and how it has progressed.

Final Thoughts

There are many other features that are used in online teaching platforms. We imagine that most of them could be used in such a way as to demonstrate, foster, and reinforce the development of meta-knowing. But the use of such tools must be deliberate. We do not believe such progression which, in our minds, is the hallmark of developing a positive awareness of “Other” in the minds of students, will occur by accident. Because of the nature of the online teaching and learning environment where interactions can be so easily made visible and progress can so easily be demonstrated, we feel that online teaching and a critical understanding of “Others” can be the perfect match. But it is NOT enough to employ online course tools that demonstrate and foster the kind of critical questioning and answering process that promotes meta-knowing. Students MUST know that such demonstrations of meta-knowing are required for success in the course and they must be held accountable in visible ways – rewarded when that progress is demonstrated and reminded when it is not.

In our course, we employ a scoring rubric for all assignments in which individual students (or groups for group projects and assignments) receive a score on each of four levels of what we refer to as a “model for critical thinking.” This model, as outlined above, involves: (1) Recitation, (2) Exploration, (3) Understanding, and (4) Appreciation. Recitation requires that students state known facts or opinions. As mentioned in terms of Kuhn’s (1999) levels of meta-knowing, this step involves acknowledging what aspect(s) of one’s declarations are factual and what elements are based on opinion. With exploration, students are expected to analyze the roots of the opinions or facts they have just stated and labelled as opinion or fact. With understanding, a student demonstrates an awareness of other views and an awareness of the difference(s) between one’s views and the views of others. Appreciation involves an awareness of the differences between one’s own views and opinions and those of others. Understanding involves acknowledging that others may think about the world differently than we do. Appreciation involves knowing the nature and extent of those differences and from where those differences might have come.

As outlined above, it is our belief that online teaching platforms and the pedagogical tools they make available are a perfect match for “self-other” understanding. Because the faculty member simply cannot lecture, interactions can become the standard operating procedure of the course. By utilizing the tools in a way that demonstrates, fosters, reinforces AND “assesses” students on the critical questioning and answering process that is the hallmark of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. We do NOT mean to imply that simply teaching a course online will guarantee that it will follow a critical thinking process that promotes self-other analysis. We mean that such a philosophy and online teaching can be a perfect match. In order to achieve this match, however, one must keep critical questioning and answering in mind as one develops the course and implements the pedagogical tools.

For a full discussion of this critical thinking model and how it can be used to demonstrate, foster and evaluate meta-knowing as part of an online course, we encourage the reader to see Osborne, et al 2009a and 2009b.

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