



Using discussion threads in Sociology classes

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Big Ideas



- Create a **Sense of Community**
 - Co-develop a common stock of knowledge specific to the class
- Moving Sociology from Knowledge to Action
 - **ORIENTATION**
 - Not just the tool, but how we use it
 - Build reflexive relations to contexts, structures and conditions
- **Using Activities to Develop an Artful Approach to Dialogue**
- Low Technology
 - **Keeping it simple**

Making Personal Connections

- Emphasize the class as 'learning community'
- Introduce yourself
- Invite students to share about themselves (e.g., photos, bios, etc.) and introduce themselves to others



What is discussion weaving?



An Iterative Process of Co-learning
A Commitment to Community Building
A Practice of Learning to Think in Multiple Directions

Discussion Weaving

- Lecture and discussions are interwoven, increasingly so as the course progresses
- Discussions not a supplement or compliment to a lecture/lesson
- Create space in lectures to incorporate discussions, weave content and lecture on discussion boards through your responses
- Invite students to reply to classmates and to you, and reply back
- Use discussion forum activities (not just questions)
- Enhances both student and instructor engagement

Discussions that won't put people to sleep



**Create,
Make,
Reflect,
Contribute**



Example #1: Create Something New Discussion Board as Maker Space

Drawing on what we have read, viewed, visited, discussed and pondered in our course this term, the task for lesson 10 involves **creating some 'thing' new**. What you create should **'speak back' to where and how you find yourself**, positioned vis-a-vis historical, social, political and economic structures and conditions not of your making. This new 'thing' (human made object) could be a dance move, a song, a sculpture, a drawing, a painting, a poem, a collage, photography, culinary arts (cooking/baking), textiles (clothing/fashion), crafts (wood working, jewelry).

- **There are 2 parts to this exercise:** 1) On the **Discussion Forum** below please post a picture or video of your object with a brief description of what it is, and what it *does*. 2) Again, using the **Discussion Forum reply function**, please share a comment with at least one of your classmates to let them know how their object *moves you towards a new, different, or deeper way of imagining the social*.



Questions, Reflections



Example #2: Weaving Students In AUDIO REFLECTIONS

- **GETTING STUDENTS THINKING ACROSS READINGS**
- Students self-record and upload recordings (approx. 5 minutes)
- Synthesize course materials (readings and diverse sources)
- Students do not engage with one another (private to professor)
- Due in advance of live full-class discussions
- Greater investment - use sparingly (2x)
- Develop skills in synthesis and comfort with their own voices



Questions, Reflections



Example #3: Weaving in the Discipline

PHOTO VOICE

- At the end of each lesson students will post on the discussion board a photograph of a scene that reflects a connection to the lesson content and/or questions.
- Students will use the photograph to answer the questions:
 - **What is social policy?**
 - **Why is the study of social policy important?**
 - **What can the study of social policy teach us?**
- At the end of the term students will collect all photographs they posted and write a short essay on what the photographs say about social policy.



Questions, Reflections



Example #4: Weaving in the World

BLOG CARNIVALS

- Students must choose a disability-related topic, research disability blogs (which adopt a disability studies perspective), and compose a long-form blog post of at least 800 words that synthesizes the main messages from 3 blogposts written by 3 different authors related to their chosen topic, and 1 required course reading.
- The purpose of this assignment is to have students apply knowledge of a disability studies perspective gained from the required readings to a search, analysis, and synthesis of materials from outside of the course, using concepts from the course readings.



Questions, Reflections



Managing time - know your bandwidth

- Clarify what you will **NOT** do
- Do not always reply to every single student every time - 'batch replies' - pull together a few replies in one reply to a student
 - Lecture can incorporate a 'global reply'
 - Individualized replies acknowledge work and enhance accountability
 - When public, be kind - students read replies on the other students' comments
- Check-in online routinely
- More time on the discussions than the lectures
 - lectures are scaffolds, vignettes
 - weave the lectures into the discussions
 - cite passages from text, be thoughtful in replies

More than a number

- Students with accommodations can complete discussion components one-on-one with professors
- Evaluation can be responsive (e.g., option to drop lowest one, greater weight later reflections)



**What have you learned?
What are you wondering?
What can you share?**

Lessons Learned...

- Expectations around **(non)collaboration** must be clearly and consistently communicated
- Having **time and space** to respond on your own terms is enriching and transformative (for students and teachers)
- You can put students in conversation without putting them in break-out rooms (through your **feedback**)
- Responding is a work of art! You are an artist! Students are artists!

Additional Resources

- **"10 tips for effective online discussions":** <https://er.educause.edu/blogs/2018/11/10-tips-for-effective-online-discussions>
- **What is a 'Blog Carnival'?:** <https://fairyblogmother.co.uk/what-is-a-blog-carnival/>
- **Critical feedback in the arts (theatre):** <https://www.theatrefolk.com/podcast/getting-and-giving-feedback-the-theatrefolk-podcast/>