"PARTICIPATION" IN ONLINE DISCUSSION FORUM IN DISTANCE EDUCATION: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC INQUIRY

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ABSTRACT

Interactions are important in establishing deep and meaningful learning experiences for learners in a distance education setup. Of all the activities in an online classroom, the discussion forum proved to be the one that had the most interactions. A discussion forum lets learners interact with the content, peers, and teachers. Participation in these learning activities is one important factor. The more the learners participate, the more they learn. This paper uses the researcher's experience in determining what participation is in an online learning experience. After reviewing the experience, participation in a discussion forum is defined as a self-induced connection to the learning community to receive and share knowledge to bring a deeper understanding of a certain theory or phenomenon." There are conditions for a behavior or action that can be considered participation. The more conditions the behavior met, the higher the level of participation it led. The conditions are the learner analyzes an abstract theory or concept and relates it to practice or experience; the learner views other people's perspectives regarding the subject and synthesizes a stronger and deeper understanding of the acquired knowledge; the learner communicates the acquired understanding of a certain subject that induces a validation or further inquiry; lastly, the learner constructed a train of premeditated discourse that leads to the understanding of a certain subject.

INTRODUCTION

Discussion Forum in distance education plays a vital role in the learning process. It is an activity wherein individuals who are interested or knowledgeable with a certain concept interact by exchanging thoughts, experiences or observations (Kadagidze, 2014). Networked technologies influenced the design and use of such activity as they opened a whole new opportunity for more efficient communication done at a distance. This not only enhances the quality of learning but also opens a bigger world for learners. It breaks the barriers of learning which were supposed to be inside the classroom and lets the learners connect to others almost anywhere around the globe. This opportunity can only be maximized when we as learners engage in such activities and maximize the resources and knowledge generated through it.

Many are still skeptical about the effectiveness of online learning; the interaction and the assessments governing the teaching and learning process. A lot of this is due to the lingering traditional concept of learning wherein learners can only learn inside the classroom, wherein students are directly interacting with their peers and teachers. This is not always the case. Speer explained that deep and meaningful learning can also happen online. *"If two people can fall in love online, they can learn American History online* (Lieberman, 2019a).

In this paper, we reflect on my experiences in being a part of an online discussion forum to define what "participation" in an online discussion means.

Discussion Forum

Before going through the definition of participation, it is better to initially understand what a discussion forum is. Discussion forum is an asynchronous communication tool wherein teachers and students interact to provide meaning and understanding for a certain concept or theory. (Kaminski, 2007). It encourages collaboration between learners as it provides a space where they can share their common interests and perspective regarding a common theme or topic. Moreover, a construction of new knowledge (Katz et al., 2005 as cited by De Lima et al., 2019).

Discussion forums can provide the students a space wherein they can learn not only from the teacher but also from their classmates. This can alleviate pressure on the students' end as they can seek the help of others in the understanding of the learning materials (Lieberman, 2019a). It also teaches learners certain skills that are far beyond the competencies asked for by a certain course. Discussion forum can teach them netiquette, improve their writing skills, they learn how to construct and manage their learning networks and increase their confidence in expressing themselves (Deakin University, n.d., Lieberman, 2019a)

As Thomas (2002) noted, the online discussion forum provides significant opportunities for students to actively engage in their learning process through active participation. Studies investigating the technology-rich classrooms found that the students demonstrated superior attitudes, involvement and engagement with the course content (Dorman and Fraser, 2009). Using technology tools as supportive to lectures can reinforce course information through multiple modes of knowledge representation and comprehension. This improves their learning outcomes by contributing to their intellectual growth and critical thinking (Pena-Shaff and Nicholls, 2004). Other important payoffs of using technology tools include flexibility, convenience and accessibility for students to complete their learning anytime and anyplace. However, studies have shown that motivating students to actively participate and contribute in online discussions was challenging. Perceived lack of relevance and usefulness seems to hinder student motivation as they assume an 'invisible' online role posting discussions with minimal content (Beaudoin, 2002).

Confusion, anxiety, apprehension in writing and difficulty in phrasing, and time constraints are other reasons attributed to student passivity or non-participation in ODFs. Another potential problem was the evaluation of the student's contribution towards the online discussions. Students find it difficult to engage in the activity when their interactions are more virtual. The limitation of the personalization of learning affects their motivation in learning. (Bullen, 1998). Most research done compares learning in face-to-face lectures and online discussion forums (Meyer, 2003), the role of teachers in online discussion forums (Mazzolini and Maddison, 2007), student interactions in an online learning environment (Pena-Shaff and Nicholls, 2004), and assessment strategies to evaluate content understanding (Gaytan and

McEwen, 2007). Further research is needed to understand the relationship between participation, interaction and learning when ODFs are used as an additional activity aside from the traditional classroom lectures. Furthermore, the majority of research studies in the above stream have focused on the qualitative research approach in understanding the students' participation in an online discussion forum (De Wever et al., 2006; Jiang and Ting, 2000). While the evidences from this research approach have been valuable, further research is needed to identify salient factors that influence interaction and learning in an ODF (Brook and Oliver, 2003). This aims for an investigation and analysis of antecedents and outcomes of using ODFs with traditional classroom lectures.

Participation

Participation in distance learning is believed to be the key driving element that produces a positive effect on the learning affecting the perceived knowledge, quality of projects, assignments and, grades of students (Hrastinski, 2008). A study further concluded that "*underperforming students in one or more modules are commonly those that interact seldomly than those students who passed."* (Davies & Graff, 2005, as cited by Hrastinski, 2008). Hrastinski introduced six (6) levels of online participation that define how students interact in an online learning setup.

Another study of Hrastinski theorized that online learning is viewed as online participation and that these two are assumed to be inseparable and jointly constituting. This gives the understanding that the development of student learning in a distance e-learning setup relies on the design of learning that encourages participation. He further stipulated four (4) assumptions that define participation. First, "*participation is a complex process of maintaining relations with others.* Second, "*it is supported by physical and psychological tools.* Third, "*it is not synonymous with talking or writing.* Lastly, "*it is supported by all kinds of engaging activities."* (Hrastinski, 2009).

Participation of adults in online learning is commonly affected by three motivators. *Intellectual stimulation, socialization and self-esteem* (Mulenga & Liang, 2008). These motivators affect how adults participate in learning activities. Participation in online learning tends to function as a repair mechanism for adults to increase their self-esteem. Moreover, used to create connections among individuals of the same age and interest (Fisher & Wolf, 2000 as cited by Mulenga & Liang, 2008). Participation, in this study, is perceived to be more inclined to socialization than knowledge construction.

Research Questions

The goal of this study is to understand and define "participation" in an online discussion forum within a formal distance learning setup. This intends to share the researchers own account of online learning to identify Moreover, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What characteristics define an authentic online discussion forum participation?
2. What are the different manners of participating in an online discussion forum?

Conceptual Framework

The researchers decided to create a framework that details the understanding of certain concepts and arranges them in a coherent flow that will lead to the better understanding of "participation".
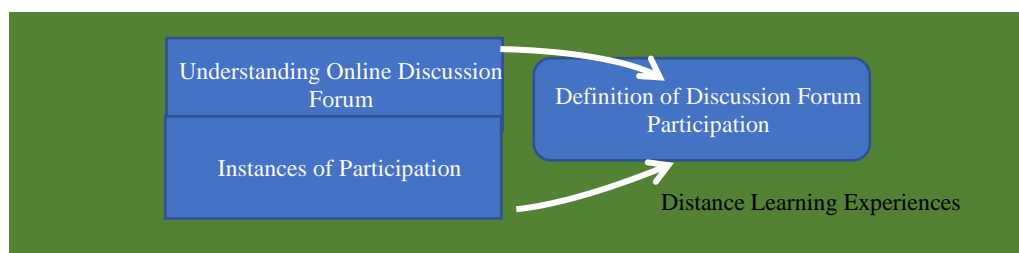

Figure 1. Framework in defining participation

Figure 1 explains that the realization of the definition of discussion forum participation will be done through careful observation of the distance learning experiences. To fully grasp participation in the context of the online discussion forum, they first seek to identify what is an online discussion forum and its role in distance learning. Together with this understanding, they will map the instances to which they participated in an online discussion forum and realize whether this participation has produced a positive meaning towards their learning experience. These two concepts will then build up the definition of online discussion forum participation.

Assumptions

The researchers came up with two assumptions that will guide them towards the autoethnographic inquiry. First, the researchers assume that participation in discussion forum entails more than just sharing conceived ideas. The second assumption is that discussion forum provides students a "*learning community*" that influences them to participate in the knowledge exchange.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

An autoethnographic research design will be used. Autoethnographic research employs the "*personal experiences of the researcher for the purposes of extending sociological understanding*" (Wall, 2008). The researchers' experiences and memories will be discussed through a narrative inquiry that will support the understanding of online learning and participation. Narrative inquiry allows researchers to unlock and understand a lived experience (Eisenbach, 2015). Rather than being a spectator, the researchers, through this method, can use themselves as participants of the study (Nuñez & Gula, 2022).

The research follows an epistemological assumption that a meaning is being constructed based on the observations and meanings are. Moreover, it seeks to interpret the meaning of the environment. The researchers collect evidence from their experiences of being close or being with the participants being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2016; James & Busher, 2012). Following these assumptions, the researchers came to realize the meaning of participation through a careful interpretation and analysis of an individual's experience of participating in an online discussion forum within a formal distance education setup. The interpreted meanings are based on how they view participation and how they experienced participation during the three trimesters of their study.

Narrative on Online Discussion Forum Experiences

I will be sharing my experiences as a distance education student at University of the Philippines Open University. Having been in an Open and Distance eLearning Institution for almost a year now, I have been lucky to experience and learn in a manner that is far beyond what is considered to be normal and traditional education. It opened new perspectives as to how I study, how I learn and how I look after myself. This narrative discusses experiences I got over the two trimesters that I had finished and the third that I am currently undergoing.

Exploring the Unknown – 1st Trimester S.Y. 2019-2020

The first semester of the program "Master of Distance Education" commenced on August 24, 2019. Being new to the method of learning at the university, I was very anxious about how I could cope with the number of materials and activities I had to finish. On top of that, I knew no one from my cohort or anyone within the university. I felt a bit lost especially in the first few weeks of the trimester as there are no strict schedules as to when we will study, how we will study, and I have absolutely no idea on what to expect from the courses I have taken.

Courses in the first term of the first year typically tackle the theoretical foundations of the program. A lot of the materials given were journals, research papers and books. It was really challenging for me to go through the materials quickly as I am not really inclined into reading lengthy academic publications.

Luckily, most of the activities that we need to do have sets of guidelines and instructions that help us better understand what we need to learn and what we are going to study. Every week we are expected to access materials that were recommended or required by our faculty-in-charge. There were at least three materials to be read and understood for each of the courses we are enrolled in. Aside from this, we are encouraged to use resources beyond those that were introduced.

I usually study in the morning from 7:00 am up until 10 or 11:00 am. This is because I am up all night as my schedule at work is from 10:00 pm until 7:00 am. And because this learning method is new to me, I also use the breaks I have at work to study the things I need to learn so as to be ahead of the scheduled tasks of the university; a decision that helped me a lot over the first term. Aside from the weekly reading materials, we are also tasked to participate in online forums. The first forum I joined was just for us to introduce ourselves to the class as well as to the faculty-in-charge. Knowing no one in the class, it took me around an hour to construct my personal introduction. I was still anxious about my writing and how I think I sound based on my writing. There I was introducing myself, what my current employment is, explained why we took such a program and the hobbies that I do and enjoy. We were also asked to attach a photo that represents what we enjoy doing most. I decided to put a picture of the mangrove forest I visited at Puerto Galera.

Our conversation as classmates typically revolves on the online discussion forum found on the myPortal (Moodle platform) of UPOU. I didn't have the urge to communicate to them through any other means of communication aside on the platform introduced to us.

On the official start of the use of discussion forum as academic conversations, we were asked to post our reflections or answers to the question posted by the faculty-in-charge. Excited, I immediately drafted my discussion forum post. The first question led us to reflect on how the separation of teacher and students in distance learning affects teaching and learning. I spent the first day of the week coursing through the different reading materials and surfing the internet for other information that might help me better explain my reflection so as to back it up with relevant and valid information. The next day, I was able to post my reflection and was able to respond to a couple of my classmates. This was my post:

"On my observations with the educators that handle DE, they are more focused with facilitating the engagement of students with the course content made before the implementation of the program which is somewhat different than the traditional lecture done inside the classroom (Moore 1985, 1978). In this approach, we students can process the materials and resources to establish our understanding of these concepts to be verified by both our teacher and our classmates. These unbiased approaches towards learning are explained by Keegan (1980) in his discussion on the Nature of DE supported by Downe's (2006) concept on the disintermediation of teachers.

As a student, I am overwhelmed by the notion of DE on being independent of the student with learning (being far from my teacher and classmates physically). But as the course progressed, I began to appreciate DE. This is because we, as students, are more engaged in intellectual discussion and conversations through different kinds of media aware of it of being didactic or for socialization purposes. An experience that is clearly defined by Flinck (1975, 1978 as cited in Keegan (1980), that the work of the students can be executed individually, or in groups and the communication can be done in different media. In conclusion, I see that the removal of distance as a limitation in the educational setup provides more venue for educators as well as students. This means that they can connect to a vaster network which improves the learning experience as well as the learner's perspective towards self – directed learning (Wedemeyer, 1977a as cited by Moore & Adnerson, 2003)."

After a day, one of my classmates asked me this question:

"If you were a DE teacher, how woud you address the immediate concerns of the students if, for example, the set-up of discussion is asynchronous. I still hold the notion that there should be someone is authority to confirm, strengthen, support or reject the ideas, outright! What are other parameters to observe to address this case?"

Posting a discussion forum entry is a bit scary for me as I am not that well-versed in constructing responses in a didactic conversation. After going through different resources beyond what is recommended, I came up with a response, that is:

"As of the present time, I could only hold on the possible feedback done through communication of the students with their tutor through any type of media (Flinck 1975,1978). So the only possible way for us to confirm out discussion is to verify everything through a correspondence with our tutor. Being in an open and distance learning set-up we can only rely on asynchronous communication initiated by us and is done virtually (Moore, 1975,1977). Correct me if I'm wrong, Flinck (1975, 1978), in his elaboration of Moore's (1975,1977) definition of distance education stated that communication can also be in media such as "telephone" and it may be combined with various forms of "face - to - face" meetings. I have no clue as to what are the parameters of these "face - to - face" meetings that Flinck discusses."

The conversation continued for another two responses until the discussion between me and him faded. There was an active exchange of realizations between me and my classmates. I was also able to clarify some inputs that were posted by my classmates. Posting questions or supporting what they have discussed through citing some additional references.

An Unexpected Forum Participant

I felt a bit light on the second discussion forum done on the third week. I was also getting faster in comprehending the different materials given to us. Unlike the first discussion forum, I decided to let my classmate post their discussion first so that I could look at some of their ideas first. After around 6-8 of my classmates finished posting their understanding. Reading their response, I was able to strengthen my understanding and answer the problem at hand. Here is my post:

"Based on my readings, I can conclude that distance education is undergoing constant and continuous evolution. An evolution which depends on the emergence of different media brought about by the various technological advancement that aids to the dissemination of learning materials as well a venue to implement two – way communication. (Padolina et al., 2007, p.27) Furthermore, this development has been based on the concepts and practices implemented by its predecessors and that every generation is just a prototype of the next. (Anderson & Dron, 2009)

Anderson (2009) had got me thinking on the importance of finding a "middle ground between technological or pedagogical determinism." Being able to extend all learning materials to students will not provide extensive learning as it would prevent the development of pedagogy. (Anderson & Dron, 2009) Each generation improves the extent to which interaction would be present and available on the technology present. On the conceptual framework made by Tyler(n. d., p.3), it is clearly shown that the latter generations exhibit improved interactivity between learner – teacher, learner – content or learner-learner. The development, such as automated responses given to learners and the development of Interactive Multimedia. This "development" was also mentioned by Garrison (1985, p.237). The successful process of immediate feedback giving would mark progress in DE.

To summarize, the development of Distance Education is far beyond its pinnacle, and it would be subject to fast changes as our technology advances. As of now, AR (Augmented Reality), VR (Virtual Reality), and other interactive multimedia are being combined with the traditional media used in distance education."

I felt happy after looking at what I had written. Little by little, I am beginning to improve on my writing and hopefully be better especially in quickly understanding a lot of readings and communicating my ideas to others. Everything was going fine until this response came:

"You shared your insights on "...the importance of finding a "middle ground between technological or pedagogical determinism."

Is technology the primary driver of the teaching and learning process in distance education? Or is it pedagogy?

Please explain your answer.

What, for you, is the role of technology and pedagogy in DE?
Anyone in class may answer this question."

Our professor asked me and my classmates a series of questions that really opened a lot of discussion. This is a new experience for us as we didn't expect that the faculty could and will sometimes join in the discussion forum. Different perspectives came about after the posting of the question. Almost the whole class joined in the thread of my discussion. Some of them were with technological determinism but some sides with the pedagogical determinism. After thinking about the concepts and reviewing the materials, I cannot seem to decide what is most important as the two (pedagogy and technology) go hand in hand in distance education. Hence, I wrote:

"I adhere to what Anderson (2009) stated in his paper on "Three Generations of DE Pedagogy." He explained that these two components (technology and pedagogy) are "intertwined in a dance." I second the thought shared by Sir Lio in this thread, these two components cannot outweigh each other. I couldn't consider technology as the primary driver because it only mediates the communication brought about the learning process itself(pedagogy). If there is no pedagogy, all of the conversations made for and within the medium is just for socialization purposes. It does not promote the deep and meaningful exchange of ideas. On the other hand, no learning process can happen through distance education if the medium that provides two - way communication is inexistent.
With these concepts in mind, I can suggest that technology and pedagogy are two critical elements for DE, and in any instance that one of them would be missing, no distant education can take place."

The thread followed and some classmates of mine had the same understanding and stand regarding the question that our professor gave. It is good to know that you have some people who have the same belief as you and it is exhilarating for me to know that there are a lot of other perspectives on certain things and there are a lot more to understand in what we study. I came to understand that there are different truths on the concepts that relate to our study.

The term continued as it was supposed to. A lot more exchange of realizations and understanding came together with the different activities and assessments that we accomplished. The creative project on one of the courses led me to personally meet some of my classmates. I was able to let go of the fear that I am here studying alone. It greatly boosted my confidence and removed much of my anxiety about the learning process.

Into Another Episode of Forums – 2nd Trimester S.Y. 2019-2020

I am glad that I have passed the courses I had during the first term. My enthusiasm continues to grow as I go through the courses. On the second term, I focused on increasing my comprehension so that I could read a lot more studies and widen up my resources. It was only this time that I was able to use the online library resources of the university. Which was a good thing as there are a lot more studies that I can read more than the existing open educational resources.

The discussion forum on the courses on the second term to a different turn. As I was used to having questions that guided me towards my learning, the discussion forum in the courses let us discuss freely what we understood on each module. This made it hard for me as I need to readjust myself with this another heightening of freedom on our studies. I was lost. I don't know what I want to share. Nonetheless, I was able to write this:

"I had a fair share of experience with EdTech both in the school setting and in the industrial setting. In both settings, most instructional designers are encouraged/obliged to integrate technology inside the classroom regardless if the topic to be discussed can be effectively relayed using the technology present. Administrators purchase a specific technology/tool and require the use of it for fear of wasting their resources. The general concern is the readiness of instructional designers/teachers in using such technology.

The definition for Educational Technology (EdTech) is really beneficial for everybody, especially for professionals who study and practice it both in the school setting and in the industry setting. I also had

many misconceptions about the scope and application of Educational Technology and the readings helped me construct a clearer picture on what is EdTech and why is it important in the learning process. It should be clear that Edtech is a complex system which "facilitates and improves performance" of learners by proper construction, selection, organization and implementation of learning environment and resources (Hlynka & Jacobsen, 2009). Thus, shifting its focus from the delivery method and technologies to "the nature of the learner and learning process." Educators associate EdTech commonly with the use of technology, leaving out the pedagogical/andragogical side of it. With all the emerging technology and changes in the learning preferences of students, EdTech should provide a better understanding of contemporary problems of "what to teach, to whom and how (Corbeil, 2013)."

In conclusion, EdTech is supposed to be a system that reduces the transactional distance through the proper selection of technology together with sound pedagogy and andragogy (Luppicini, 2005, as cited by Corbeil, 2013). With technology being available to anyone and anytime, the academe should maximize this opportunity to enhance student learning and create a better way of passing on relevant skills which people can utilize concretely."

The post I had with this particular forum got no response from my classmates. Only a few students of the class were able to initiate discussion. Getting no response from your discussion forum post is a bit frustrating. But then again, it led me to think what was lacking from my post. Why wasn't it able to get any response?

The second forum came to be, and I was able to initiate two responses from my peers. But in this particular forum, I was able to understand the concepts better through the analysis of the post made by my peers. I appreciated the way they used their experiences as tenured teachers and associated it to the theories discussed. With that, I was able to set some questions that apply to the practicality of the field. One of the responses I made goes like this:

"You have opened a great issue that happens frequently to the different schools now. With the last school where I taught, my subject coordinators tended to be blinded by the rules over the extensive use of technology inside the classroom. Our "skillfulness" as an educator depends on how we use the application given to us by the school without really considering the appropriateness of it to the content being discussed. The creativity of the teacher towards instruction is being killed by the system. You are not "skilled" enough if you cannot use technology in your whole period. They forget that there are certain concepts, skills, or stages in the learning experience wherein teachers should use other methods like chalk and board type of instruction, flash cards, etc. They have killed the student-centeredness of instruction by putting too much emphasis on the use of technology. The technology should not be the star of the classroom. It should merely support in the effective and efficient delivery of instruction. Are there any policies on your current workplace that encourages variation of technologies implemented inside classrooms?"

From there I reviewed my previous courses and previous post and tried to rethink the application of the theories presented to the actual teaching and learning process I encounter. More than my understanding of abstract knowledge, I came to be more critical to how it is applied in the practice. This is how my discussion forum post continued for the rest of the course as it mostly dealt with the application of technologies into teaching.

Right into the Present – 3rd Trimester S.Y. 2019-2020

A lot of stuff was happening during the 3rd Trimester. A lot of environmental disasters came to happen, and it had affected our capability to study efficiently. Nevertheless, we still continue on learning amidst everything. We can never stop learning. It is not a negative thing. I am impressed that even though there are a lot of things happening. Distance learning proves to be an efficient way to deliver knowledge to students without the fear of compromising their health, safety and time. Honestly, I wasn't really able to focus during this trimester because of an outside factor. The freedom given to us for our studies got even more higher. During this time, we were not even required to post to the discussion forum from time to time. It is within our discretion whether we share something or not. Nevertheless, I continued to work on

improving ways on how I share my knowledge and communicate through discussion forum. One of the posts I have written was a bit long, but I learned a lot in the process of making it. My sharing goes like this:

~"...There is no value in assessing students if it doesn't impact learning"

Dr. Lorna Earl effectively discussed the gaps we have as educators in using the assessments in the learning process. In this new era that emphasizes "Quality Education for ALL," we, as educators, should work on how we can help learners effectively learn. There is a lot of good points that were shared in the video as well as in the book. I'll be sharing my thoughts on this module through the different statements of Dr. Lorna Earl.

~"...choose the right kind of assessment and implement it in certain points in time."

This boils down to the effective usage of Assessment for Learning, Assessment as Learning and Assessment for Learning. We should know when to use the different forms of assessment and utilize the data that they produce to help us make sound judgments on the steps we need to take to improve students' learning.

~ "...Assessment is an integral part of the learning process"

It is truly a wake-up call to all of us educators to look over the assessment process differently. Assessment should not only be a measure of learning; a decision-making tool to say who among the learners passed and failed. It should also be a tool that helps us educators to map out the different levels of learning for each student and make necessary actions that can help us create a more engaging learning experience for the students that can ensure equality and equity.

~"...You cannot teach students one at a time. You can teach three groups one at a time."

This emphasizes "Assessment for Learning." This aspect of learning focuses on finding out the different misconception students have within a certain topic. This is done commonly through diagnostic and formative assessments that we do before and during the learning process. This makes us identify which students need more support in the topic and which students need less.

~"...teach learners how to be self-assessors of their own learning."

This emphasizes "Assessment as Learning." It should be emphasized that the learners are expected to be in a safe learning space. This means that they are in a learning atmosphere wherein they do not have the fear of making mistakes and that is a natural part of the learning process. This safe learning environment should be supported through teaching our learners how to use tools or how to make judgments on the level of their learning.

~"...learners should know how to assess their own learning."

Teachers should guide the learners in assessing their own learning progress. As educators, we should be clear about their learning and performance goals. Giving them tools and examples such as rubrics, feedback, etc. that will give them an idea of where they should focus on.

~"...assessment should measure students' learning."

Assessment of learning measures the student achievement after the learning of the content. It is used to make decisions such as student placement, student achievement, accreditation of performance, etc.

Reflections on the quality of assessment.

Educators of different academic institutions should come together and calibrate the measures of learning so that all are able to identify what to do next. TO BE AT THE SAME PAGE. I thought of LESSON STUDY as an effective tool for evaluating the quality of assessment. There should be an instance wherein we can evaluate the assessment we give so that we can improve it on its next implementation.

In the recent EDUTECH Asia webinar I attended entitled Transformation in Assessment - how online assessment can be effective now and to be prepared for the future, one of the points they have with assessment is that, educational institution should create assessment policies or review (existing) assessment

policies so that all of their teachers can have a clear grasp of how they could measure learning through efficient and effective integration and implementation of assessment in the learning process.

On the other course that I took, most of the discussion forums were just there if we have certain questions that we need assistance from. There are a lot of things that I think I need to learn and to practice. And I know that through this experience, I became connected to a vast network of learners that can help me be better as a learner and as a teacher.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results based on the Assumptions
...participation in discussion forum entails more than just sharing conceived ideas.

Based on the experiences shared through the narrative, discussion forum proves to be more than just a venue for sharing conceived ideas. The series of social interactions proved that online discussion forums encourage self-reflection and critical thinking among learners. Social interaction is being strengthened by letting the students realize their shared interests and experiences and connecting it to the concepts at hand (Kaminski, 2007). Participation in the online discussion forum entails a review of one's life experiences in relation to the concept being studied. Discussion can bring about understanding or further inquiries that leads to deeper and more meaningful learning (Kadagidze, 2014; De Lima et al., 2019).

...discussion forum provides students a "learning community" that influences them to participate in the knowledge exchange.

Through the guidance of the faculties-in-charge, the online discussion forum becomes a place wherein students are slowly being trained to share their ideas to a group of people having the same or opposing views over a certain topic or problem (De Lima, 2019; Lieberman, 2019b). The guides, questions and posts on the discussion forum made by the faculties-in-charge and students gives them a sense of connection and understanding towards their peers that improves their confidence and skills in communicating their ideas (Cho & Tobias, 2016).

Emerging Themes on Discussion Forum Participation

The themes presented on this study are based on the interpreted meaning of the instances wherein the subject is participating in a particular discussion forum. This will consider both the interactions made through the discussion forum post and the personal experience and emotions of the learner during each discussion forum participation.

Participation as Active Sharing of experience

Learners enter the online classroom with a unique career, academic stories and life experiences that enhance discussion and learning. Not all sharing needs to be planned out, if the student is doing something great then give them an opportunity to share it.

After a day, one of my classmates asked me this question:

"If you were a DE teacher, how would you address the immediate concerns of the students if, for example, the set-up of discussion is asynchronous. I still hold the notion that there should be someone who has authority to confirm, strengthen, support or reject the ideas, outright! What are other parameters to observe to address this case?"

The online discussion participation entails more than the discussion of abstract theories and concepts based on how you understood it. It should engage you and your peers in the usage of such knowledge to achieve a deeper learning. This can only be achieved if you have been successful in the application, analysis or synthesis of the acquired knowledge.

Participation as having Active Engagement in the Discussions

Activities that may promote learners to think are the best way to foster active engagement. Let's say for instance thought-provoking questions will surely allow them to think outside the box. This will lead to meaningful collaboration and exchange of ideas.

"Our professor asked me and my classmates a series of questions that really opened a lot of discussion. Different perspectives came about after the posting of the question. Almost the whole class joined in the thread of my discussion. Some of them were with technological determinism but some sides with the pedagogical determinism. "

Successful participation in an online discussion forum can encourage other students to become active sharers of knowledge. The participation of an individual should lead to the participation of others in the pursuit of a deeper understanding of the concepts and theories to be learned. Unless a chain of didactic conversation can be made, there is no discussion present as discussion is an active exchange of ideas through conversation and debate that leads to a better understanding or judgment of a particular topic.

Participation as having Critical Inquiry to Concepts

"More than my understanding of the abstract knowledge, I came to be more critical to how it is applied in the practice. This is how my discussion forum post continued for the rest of the course as it mostly dealt with the application of technologies into teaching."

Critical inquiry is perceived to be a cognitive process wherein individuals question the reality of certain things and that humans possibly don't know the things they think they know (Mohanan, n.d.). Participation in online discussion forum should present a certain use of critical inquiry that is triggered by critical thinking. Participation does not only ask for your post as output in the discussion forum. Participation in discussion forum assumes that you have been able to consider what was in the resources given to you as well as your peer's perspective regarding such subject. A fully realized participation means that you also have to inquire with what your peers are learning and use these understandings to build a stronger belief as well as validate your own understanding of the knowledge acquired.

CONCLUSION

Looking over the perceived understanding of what online discussion forum participation, we can define it as a "*self-induced connection to the learning community in order to receive and share knowledge to bring about a deeper understanding of a certain theory or phenomenon.*" A fully realized participation must accomplish the following conditions:

1. Analyzed an abstract concept or theory and applied or relate it into practice or experience.
2. View other people's perspective regarding the subject and synthesize a stronger and deeper understanding of the acquired knowledge.
3. Communicated the acquired understanding of a certain subject effectively in a way that it induces a validation or further inquiry from other individuals within the learning community.
4. It constructed a train of elaborate and premeditated discourse that leads to the understanding of a certain subject using different educational resources.

Online discussion forum participation is simply taking part into action. It is a process wherein online community actively exchange meaningful discourse from a certain topic. Constant engagement of the learners makes them productive. This productivity enhances the quality of their learning. When learners started to share his/her thoughts, they also learn to express ideas in a way that others can understand. This fosters a community of inquiry which is an essential scaffold to nurture learner's participation.

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