Strengths and Weaknesses of Online Pedagogies: Videos and Discussion Forums

In an attempt to move away from the direct instruction model—where information is presented and then students are evaluated by a quiz at the end of the lesson—many instructors incorporate videos and discussion forums into their online courses. This paper discusses the strengths and weaknesses of videos and discussion forums in online instruction.

Both videos and discussion forums allow for asynchronous communication between students and instructors; they are not bound by time and space. They are easily accessible and easily embedded within learning management systems. These pedagogies also allow instructors to create the content for their course once and continue to present it each semester with minimal revision.

My concern considering these pedagogies is instructor intention. While one instructor may implement videos as a thought-provoking supplement to their content, another may rely on lectures he found on YouTube to serve as his content. While one instructor may provide intriguing prompts that encourage class discussion, another may only provide yes-or-no questions that defeat the purpose of discussion forums. Instructors who are concerned with student success are needed, and success starts with engagement.

Swan and Shih (2005) found that discussion topics related to personal experience produce the most student satisfaction. Everyone likes to talk about themselves, and personal topics increase flow of conversation. At the same time, students get to know each other and start to feel a sense of connection. Students are much more likely to remember a posting about a classmate’s family member or pet rather than their interpretation of the course reading.

While interaction can be encouraged by selecting topics that are relatable for all students, the presence and behaviors of instructors also have an impact on student interaction within
discussion forums (Swan and Shih, 2005). Instructor comments on discussion forums lets students know that the instructor is paying attention. Another way for instructors to participate in discussion is by sending personalized feedback to students via email.

Videos are another way to create engagement in the online classroom. Since the process of uploading videos via smartphones and tablets has become simplified, requiring video assignment submissions is possible as well. This can be an exciting way to mix things up for students, and according to Lin, “efforts are motivated by the ease of use, ease of creation, and ease of participation” (2008, 14).

These are examples of the right way to implement videos and discussion forums to encourage learning and engagement. However, the pedagogies themselves can be harmful to students if they are implemented with the wrong intentions. Instructors and designers who are not present in their online courses will create distance between themselves and their students. Although the quality of the course content may be excellent, what really facilitates learning is the creation and expression of one’s own ideas, along with active participation among learners.

References

Lin, L. (2008). An Online Learning Model to Facilitate Learners’ Rights to Education.
