Title:
Discussion Board Assignments: Student Reflections From an Online MSN Program

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Keywords:
Discussion board assignments, Effective online discussion forums and Online teaching strategies

References:
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Abstract Summary:
This qualitative study about what students perceive to be worthwhile aspects of discussion board assignments, in an online course, is meant to increase nurse educator understanding of this teaching tool.
Learning Activity:

LEARNING OBJECTIVES	EXPANDED CONTENT OUTLINE

1. The learner will be able to explain the background and purpose of the study.	The poster presentation for the completed research study will contain the following elements: 1) Background 2) Purpose
2. The learner will be able to analyze the student reflective statements about the use of discussion board assignments in an online course.	The poster presentation for the completed research study will contain the following elements: 3) Methods 4) Results 5) Discussion
The learner will be able to evaluate the use of discussion board assignments as a teaching tool for an online MSN course.	The poster presentation for the completed research study will contain the following elements: 6) Implications 7) Conclusions

Abstract Text:

Background: Over the past decade, there has been a shift from the mindset that online learning is less rigorous than face to face instruction, to the realization that online education is time consuming for both the instructor and the learner. Quality instructional design and course preparation involves hours of work for the online instructor; likewise, the online learner has come to understand that online education involves great effort (Paloff & Pratt, 2007). Nursing education has experienced a parallel online expansion (Braid & Abdulla, 2014; Olson & Benham-Hutchins, 2014). Much of this recent growth in online nursing education is thought to be due to the call from the Institute of Medicine's 2011 report, *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health* to provide accessible, affordable, and portable educational opportunities for nurses nationwide as a means for improvement of health care through the United States (Mann, 2014). This growth has amplified the need for nurse educators to learn effective teaching strategies in order to make students feel comfortable in the online educational environment.

Purpose: One challenge teaching online has created for the nurse educator is that instructional communication is mostly written within the online environment (Olson & Benham-Hutchins, 2014). This lack of verbal communication among learners and educators has presented educational opportunities and difficulties. Nurse educators model the art and science of nursing to student as part of the educational process (Mann, 2014). The best way in which to model the art and science through online nursing education requires continued research.

Nationwide, a growing number of schools have implemented learning management systems as a means to deliver online educations. Blackboard has become the most prevalent among the many learning systems available (Coaplen, Hollis, & Bailey, 2013). Within Blackboard, a popular means of student to student and student to instructor interaction is the discussion board forum. These discussions provide a way for students to collaborate in a similar process as they might in a course offered face to face. However, discussion board assignments, in online learning, require precise pedagogical techniques and correct instructional design to make them comprehensive learning opportunities for student interaction (Anderson, Poole, Quinn, & Schlicht, 2014). Quality Matters (QM) is a faculty centered, peer review process designed to ensure high quality online instruction (Quality Matters Program, 2015). One of the eight QM standards focuses on learner interaction and engagement. The study's purpose is to increase understanding about what students perceive to be worthwhile discussion board assignments.

Methods: The study design is retrospective, qualitative data analysis. The sampling strategy for this study is convenience methodology. Students enrolled in online MSN courses using discussion board assignments will be asked to voluntarily complete a three question, researcher created, online survey posted within the course Blackboard site. Only the researcher will have access to the anonymous data collected. Even though the data will be anonymous, all participants will be protected through confidentially. Institutional review board approval has been received for this research. Student

participation is voluntary. Survey data has been collected from a total of 36 students to date. This is ongoing research.

Results: Survey data will be retrospectively analyzed using qualitative content analysis (QCA). QCA will be used to systematically describe the meaning of the student responses to the following three open-ended questions: 1) Think about the best discussion board assignment experience you have had in an online course. Please describe the experience. What made it the best experience? 2) What amount of faculty involvement do you think works best for the discussion board assignments? and, 3) What total percentage of your grade do you think the discussion board assignments should represent in an online course? If you do not think discussion board assignments should count as part of your grade, do you have a suggestion for another type of class participation assignment? Content analysis is a research technique that provides new insights, increases researcher's understanding of a particular phenomenon, or informs practical actions (Krippendorff, 2013; Schreier, 2012).

Conclusion: Discussion board participation is one way to increase the feeling of community among learners. However, facilitating online discussion can be a frustrating experience for both the novice and seasoned instructor (Curry & Cook, 2014). One reason for this problem is the paucity of research regarding the most effective way to conduct online discussions in an instructional context to facilitate learning and formation of a cohesive learning environment. Academic excellence should be the driving force for all education, regardless of the delivery method. Increased understanding of what students perceive to be worthwhile discussion board assignment is important for all online instructors due to the frequent use of discussion board forums for assessment.