SUMMARY NOTES: DE SHARING SESSION – Structured Interactions

Present: Marty Nikou, Kara Kam, John DeLay, Cynthia Smith, Marcia Roberts-Deutsch
Monday, November 8 2:30 – 3:45

John Blumhardt supplied two handouts referencing information provided at the session: ‘Handout on DE Teaching Strategies Instructional Design what and why’; and ‘Bloom’s Taxonomy’. Anyone wanting a copy of either or both, email Cynthia.

Topic: How to promote Interactions

Cynthia started the discussion by reiterating that instructors need to ensure through structured activities that substantive student -student interaction, as well as student-instructor interaction, occurs. This need is stated in accreditation criteria for DE classes, and must be indicated explicitly in DERB proposals.

Student to Student Interactions

Kara was asked to share how she structures substantive student to student work in her Cable Speech class. She indicated she is interested in hearing how others handle some of the demands of this part of course design. Since few people were at the meeting, the hope is that others will read the summary notes and offer comments/ provide feedback via email.

The Speech class has a required *group project*. Students must work together on this; while they create their own component speeches, they must work together to create a final integrated project submitted as one final coordinated presentation (not disparate projects cobbled together). Group project is presented as a whole with transitions based on outlined process provided by instructor.

The following techniques are used to foment the group interactions necessary for this group project:

- Groups identify group leader who is responsible for coordinating activities and ensuring group stays on track, and facilitates communication with instructor. Instructor does not choose the group leader, the group does – and usually individual self-selects through volunteering. Has not been a problem in having students step up, and fulfill their responsibilities (they fulfill duties driven by interest in doing well on the project.) There is a difference between face-to-face
class where groups do not always have a designated group leader and DE class
where it is essential to have someone with explicit responsible for getting the
group going, serving as the point person between group and instructor.
Identification of group leader must take place right at the start of the semester.

- Laulima chatroom is utilized by groups for coordination, discussion of project etc.
  Each group gets their own chatroom. All members of the class can see the
  chatrooms of others. Even if students cannot be at all synchronous chats,
  Laulima archives these and students who miss the chat can see the discussion,
  and add to it later. Instructor can also then see who participated, who did not,
  who is contributing etc.

- Laulima Mail Tool also allows them to dialogue and discuss regarding the project.

- There is interaction between the group and the instructor to clarify and finalize
topic. Either this is done via the group leader, or else the group invites the
  instructor to join in their chat. Kara observes all chats but only gets directly
  involved in discussion when students request. If not done directly through the
  chatroom, communication takes place with the group leader as the key point
  person.

- Grade for project by instructor is given to the group as a whole. Students also
  receive points from each other, based on level and quality of participation.
  Instructor makes clear the criteria for grading each other (e.g. participated,
  treated others with respect)

Questions/Concerns – and Possible Responses

The group asked questions and discussed some of the challenges of carrying out this
kind of group work:

- Some students resist having to be part of synchronous activities

- Should make sure to tell students to keep their own record of *all* participation
  (in case of dispute on grade)

- Must remind students often of deadlines, and make clear in syllabus that
  students are responsible for logging in and checking mail/chats daily.

- Important tip: Instructor must lay out everything explicitly and clearly in syllabus:
  course requirements, student obligations in the project; all of the interim
deadlines and graded requirements; *how grading* will be handled.
• Could use Google apps (or similar software) for shared documents to facilitate joint working on one final document/project.

• Biggest student complaint – being graded as a group. The key is to make clear from the start – in syllabus – the group is graded as a whole, if one person does not do the work, everyone is impacted (as in real life). It was also discussed that there are positive outcomes of collective grading. There is accountability through the evaluation of other group members and students seem to like this degree of accountability. Students have proven to be motivated to not let others down (even if they skip doing individual work). Once part of a group project, there is added incentive to not let others down. One possible suggestion as a response to student complaints about joint responsibility is to separate the group grade into two components: product and process (since might be a good project but unequal degrees of participation).

• Was discussed that though students do not know each other when they are formed into a group, they get to know each other (and determine group leader) through interaction on the chatroom. They get to know each other also through initial intro speeches. They determine who does what in the project through chats with each other.

• Structuring these group activities entails a lot of work for instructor but does motivate students and leads to many areas of learning.

• It was discussed that another way to structure chats and organize student interactions is through Elluminate. Elluminate enables creation of separate chat rooms; allows the instructor to step in and out to ‘observe’; students can participate anonymously but to get credit for participation, have to sign in with their name.

Reiteration of key points: Be very clear regarding criteria for student performance and interactions; have clear deadlines and send multiple reminders; be very explicit regarding criteria of how student group work will be graded. Must have long, explicit syllabus and make frequent announcements.

Discussion then turned to ways to *structure* regular interactions between instructor and student.

**Student to Instructor Interactions**

**Filming/Capturing Student Work for Submission**
Kara shared how she makes use of videos of performance is to be presented – an example of having student –instructor interaction where student *performance* of an activity is required. She makes clear in instructions that students must have access to technological means to film/share: e.g. webcam; video cameras, camcorders, etc. Instructor also makes clear criteria for acceptable video – what instructor must see; lighting, volume. The outline of a presentation is provided to instruct for feedback and improvement. However, final filmed performance is graded, no revisions.

Marty shared what he does in his Art class. Students have to create art, and then scan/photograph and submit for a grade. There is a problem if work is not visible. Students are able to resubmit work based on instructor feedback.

One of the challenges in grading student performance / creations submitted electronically is that instructor has to know how to determine they are not ‘cheating’ – e.g. using teleprompter for a speech, creating art in the wrong medium. Have to determine ability to evaluate they are not mis-using technology and instructor has to determine how much they need to / should share with students regarding how they identify if cheating is taking place.

**Assignments**

Different methods of *ensuring* students and instructor interaction throughout the course were mentioned including:

- Weekly homework
- Projects with interim stages, deadlines – where instructor provides feedback.
- Discussion board – instructor asks questions, students post up response, instructor responds. Student work is graded.
- Discussion board – students post up questions or comments, instructor responds. Student work is graded.
- Blog - students are required to post up a blog based on contemporary issues and events. Criteria is made explicit regarding how students should respond, kinds of topics etc.. Instructor gives feedback, response and grade.

Key to recognize, doing these kinds of graded assignments takes time; need to structure assignments so work is sustainable.

**Required/Recommended Online Sessions**

Another option is having required online sessions where students participate – e.g. open office hour (synchronous chat rooms), or review sessions going over class material or student work. Marty shared his technique of using Elluminate to show PowerPoint of student work to the class, and students given opportunity to talk about
their work with all present (via mike). These sessions are not *required* but strongly recommended, and extra credit is given for ‘attendance’.

**Using Gradebook**

The use of Laulima to post grades – on the Gradebook feature – was discussed. Posting student grades serves many purposes: keeps them up to date with standing in the class; helps catch instructor input errors; and most importantly, by posting a 0 for not work, students see that there is no work done. If they have sent in the work but it was not received, they know this early on and can deal with it by resending (versus catching these problems at the end of the semester); also, if there is a 0 because they have fallen behind – Gradebook inputting becomes a reminder to them of what work is missing.

**Communication Protocol**

Sometimes students need to be reminded of appropriate communication with instructor, if student is unprofessional, should be pointed out to them the need for respectful communication.

For submission of assignments, some instructors are very explicit about how students should communicate (even for face-to-face classes where they submit work electronically). Examples of ways instructors can make clear expectations: state how they are to send work (what kind of email), how they should title work, and *format* to use.

The group spent some time discussing what email account to recommend or even require, i.e. mandatory use of hawaii.edu for all course correspondence. Shared stories of problems when students use other personal email accounts – bounced messages etc.. Requiring use of haawaii.edu prevents these problems; also entails a sent mail feature to help of there is question about work being submitted on time.

The group also discussed the issue of ensuring students know work was received; one option is to send immediate/fast ‘receipt’ of work (within hours); retuning the graded work can take place later. Another option is to require/ask students to use the ‘receipt requested’ feature of UH Webmail (though sometimes students forget or don’t want to.)

It was pointed out that an easy way to avoid the problem of students saying they sent in work (but it did not make it to instructor) leading to communication problems, delays etc, is to use the ‘Assignments’ section of Laulima where students to upload assignments, and instructor grades and uploads graded work. The program indicates if the assignment was successfully uploaded so students can be sure work was submitted. This method can be used to collect student work for DE classes or face to face sections.
Reduces email burden of instructor as well. However, students need to be reminded to look there for graded work.

**Other Topics**

It was noted that for those looking to develop webclasses or expand use of tools, one can practice using Laulima tools with a face-to-face class prior to roll out or revision of a distance class.

The issue of accessibility of student formatting came up again, students send work in advanced formats that faculty cannot access. Possible solution down the road is give all instructors access to Adobe pro (site license) – allows for grading and comments to be added.

It was shared that there was a recent news article regarding demographic change in students taking DE. No longer primarily people with logistical barriers to coming to campus; more students who can come to face to face classes but choose to learn via DE. Increased reliance on DE on campuses across the country – and even UH.