Online instructor's efficiency: Why can't we do better?

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Online teaching

- What are the problems interfering with effective teaching?
- When students learn best?
- How can online instructors do their job efficiently?

Instructor

- One of the major factors of ensuring quality learning in an online class is the instructor's professional performance (O'Neil 2006, Rothwell & Powers 2007, Palloff & Pratt 2011).

- In an online class, as in a college classroom, much depends on the instructor's preparedness, attitudes, and behaviors.

Dispositions

- Knowledge of subject matter, expertise, culture, excellence in work, work ethics, professional conduct, and pride in the teaching profession and the job
- Acting professionally and responsibly; modeling
- Articulation of assignments, tasks, requirements
- Academic rigor
- Learning environment; organization and facilitation
- Communication
- Support and feedback
- Objective assessment and evaluation
- Acceptance of critique
- Collaboration, support and feedback
- Awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses; reflection

Role modeling

- Role modeling as a manifestation of the educator's competencies and dispositions.
- They are reflected in the instructor's teaching style and implemented not through direct teaching, but through a subtle and implicit effect.
- It is the combination of an educator's personality, attitudes, knowledge, behavior, teaching, and interactions with students and other people may have on their class.

Explicit role modeling

- Communication with students should be open, meaningful, helpful and expeditious; the reaction to students' emails and posts in the discussions must be prompt, inviting and non-offensive, non-escalatory.

- The comments to student posts and assignments should be unambiguous, specific, courteous and supportive.

- The language the instructor uses should be literary, professional, courteous, rich, and linguistically and culturally correct.

Communication in online learning

- Interactivity and communication are key factors in student achievements and satisfaction (Moore, 2007; Mahle, 2007; Wanstreet, 2006; Bruck, 2005; Salmon, 2002).

- Communication is a vital tool for any type of education, but it assumes critical value in online learning.

- Instructors need to be cognizant of incorporating a significant amount of interactivity into their courses (Mahle, 2007, p. 47).

- Typically, the quality of online course outcomes can be affected by the quality of the interactions in class (Norton & Hathaway, 2008).

- Therefore, "learning through discussions or conversations is a fundamental part of teaching and learning, particularly in higher education" (Maurino 2007).

Threaded discussions

- Threaded discussions offer opportunities unavailable in synchronous communication, such as depth of thought, integration of learning resources, analysis and synthesis, critical thinking and reflection.

- Threaded discussions provide more consistent opportunities for participation, for revisiting the topic, deeper levels of student reflection, access to a broader spectrum of ideas, more concrete connections to course materials, and more ways for instructors to model higher order responses, monitor learning, and offer clarification and support for students (Gray 2002, Kirk & Orr 2003, Serdyukov & Hill 2004).

- Threaded discussion, when properly organized, can enhance knowledge construction through individual student posts addressing various aspects of the same topic, when each post contributes to the expected knowledge and all student posts in the discussion are expected to cover the topic in its entirety.

Instructor participation

- Undisciplined or uninformed instructors may demonstrate minimal, formal involvement in the discussions
- They do not contribute their content expertise and fail to engage students in higher-level thinking.
- Their feedback is limited and ineffective.
- Some online instructors believe a threaded discussion is a self-sustained activity.
- Other instructors are too heavily involved in the discussions. (Serdyukov & Hill 2009)

Research

- It is critical for the instructor to actively facilitate the discussions.
- Optimal participation in the discussions amounting to the breaking point of approximately 1600 minutes total (about 27 hours per class or about 7 hours per week or one hour a day) is desirable to ensure instructor's visibility in the classroom, demonstrate modeling, enhance motivation and provide support for students.
- Excessive instructor presence is not conducive for students' participation
- It was also found the time students spend in the discussions reading, commenting on, and presenting their own posts ultimately correlates with their grades: the more they participate, the higher are the grades (Serdyukova & Serdyukov 2009).

Relationship between instructor's and students' time in threaded discussions

Correlations between instructor and student time in the discussions
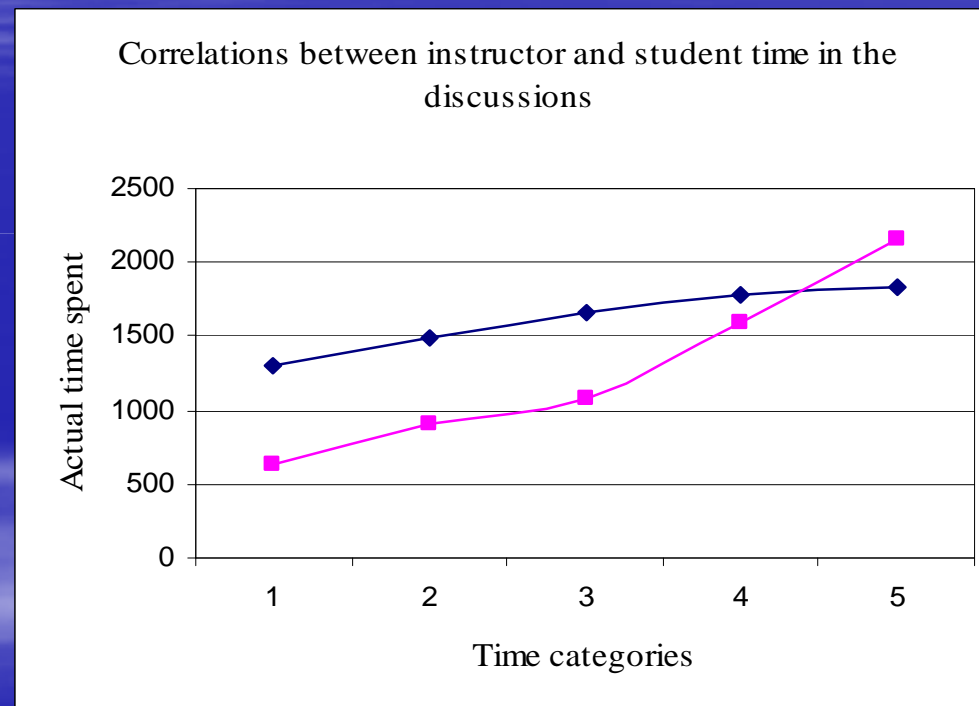
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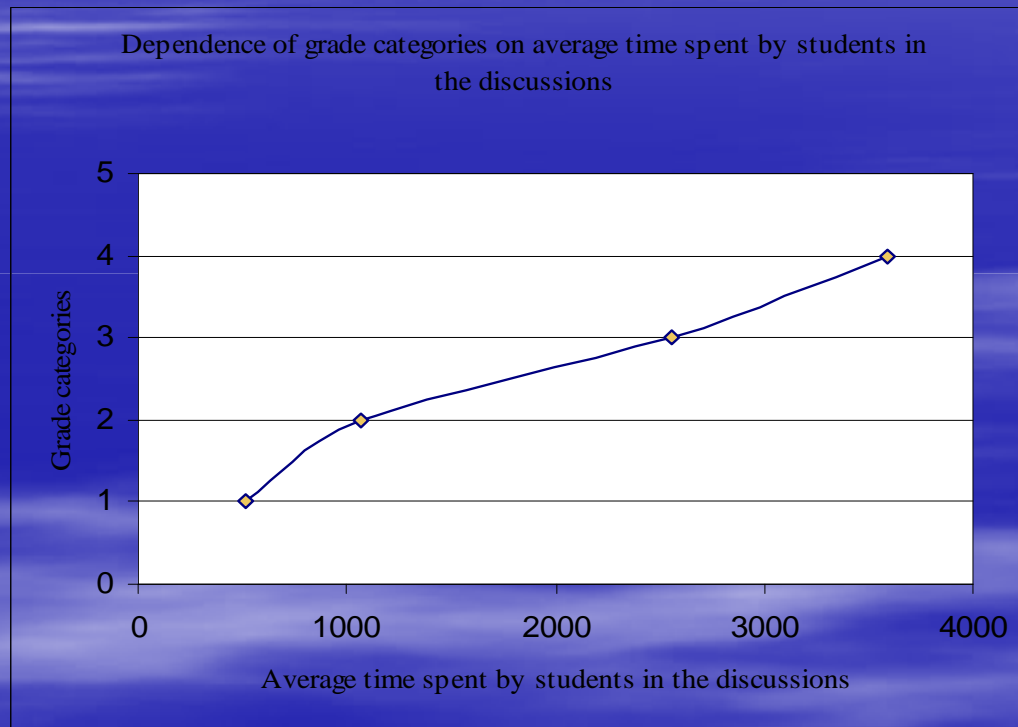
Conclusions

- Online learning outcomes are greatly affected by the efficiency of the instructor's performance in the class.

- The quality of performance depends on the instructor's dispositions, quality role modeling and effective communication.