

TiLTing the Discussion Board: Rethinking the Purpose of Online Discussion in an Online GE Writing Course

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Abstract

In 2021, I completed an instructional redesign of an online section of a general education (GE) course titled “Criticizing Television.” The redesign focused on utilizing Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TiLT) to create more meaningful engagement and deeper learning opportunities through discussion boards. Using the action research cycle of look, think, and act, this paper documents the redesign process and analyzes the Instructional Redesign assessment data to explore evidence-based practices for supporting meaningful inquiry and student engagement in online undergraduate general education course using TiLT. Strategies to support meaningful inquiry among students engaged in asynchronous online discussions using TiLT are offered.

Keywords: TiLT; Asynchronous discussion; Action research, General education

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“Lively, substantive online discussions are as rare as hen’s teeth...Discussion boards only rarely promote genuine exchange of ideas or the sophisticated interchange of opinions,” (Mintz, 2020, para. 4).

Introduction

When I first began teaching online in 2013, I utilized online discussions as many other instructors did—as a virtual replacement for face-to-face conversations. Discussion boards potentially offer students an opportunity to engage with each other and the course material, and research has shown that online discussion boards can support student engagement, enhance active learning, and co-produce knowledge (Aderibigbe, 2021; Douglas et al., 2020; Han & Hall, 2019; Hew et al., 2010; Howard et al., 2019; Shi et al., 2023). However, active engagement in online discussion does not always occur (Valenti et al., 2019) and depends on the skill of the facilitator (Douglas et al., 2020), interactions with peers (Bletcher et al., 2015), and the design of the discussion assignment (Aderibigbe, 2021). While research has shown that students benefit from asynchronous discussion, Farrell (2018) and Mintz (2020) confirm the sort of student dissatisfaction I received in Student Evaluations of Instruction (SEIs) such as this: “My one critique of the class was the use of discussion posts which I feel were just busy work and have a little educational value.” I observed that students were not using discussion boards as originally intended or critically engaging with the course material and set about rethinking the way I was doing asynchronous discussions.

This article presents an instructional redesign that utilizes the Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TiLT) framework to improve student engagement with discussion boards in an undergraduate general education (GE) online course. After reviewing literature related to TiLT and its application to online learning, this study presents detailed descriptions of interventions, analyzes instructional redesign assessment data, and offers evidence-based practices for supporting meaningful inquiry and student engagement in online undergraduate general education course using TiLT.

Transparency in Learning and Teaching (TiLT)

TiLT is a framework for course design that aims to improve students’ understanding of how they learn, encourages instructors to communicate how individual activities work towards learning objectives and outcomes, and advance more equitable teaching and learning practices. Methods that assist student understanding towards this end include:

- Clearly articulating learning goals and the rationale for each assignment
- Providing grading rubrics and detailing expectations
- Debriefing graded tests and assignments by identifying patterns and reviewing changes or revisions
- Asking students to record and reflect on their process of working and learning (Winkelmes, 2014)

Bata (2022) applies Winkelmes’ (2014) work on TiLT to online teaching broadly, explaining,

Redesigning online learning materials using TiLT principles would include a clear and concise purpose, appropriate tasks, and criteria to increase academic confidence, sense of belonging, and metacognitive awareness of all students, with minority and disadvantaged students reaping the most benefits. (Bata, 2022, p. 163)

There are many benefits to utilizing TiLT. Howard et al. (2020) and Bata (2022) found that the adoption of transparent assignment guidelines improved the learning outcomes for underserved students. Wengier and Dubuisson (2023) found that TiLT helped establish teacher, social, and cognitive presence, “rekindled [teacher] enthusiasm for pedagogical experimentation” (p. 112), and increased student ownership and engagement in online courses.

TiLT offers tools to facilitate meaningful inquiry and promote deep learning. Aderibigbe (2021) describes deep learning as the “thorough reflection and critical analysis” (p. 2) of material, which entails relating ideas to previous knowledge and experience and reflecting on the logic. Conversely, surface learning is evidenced by a performance orientation (Folk, 2018) that attends “only on what is required for assessment, not reflecting on purpose or strategies, and failing to distinguish guiding principles or patterns” (Aderibigbe, 2021, p. 4). Ambrose et al.’s (2010) strategies to cultivate deep learning parallel those offered by TiLT, including creating a supportive environment, showing relevance to students’ current academic lives and future professional lives, and giving students the opportunity to reflect.

Though few studies explore the use of TiLT in an online context (Bata, 2022; Wengier & Dubuisson, 2023), and none focused on its usefulness for asynchronous discussion, TiLT offers a framework to reconsider how and why we use discussion boards to promote deep learning. Research has much to say about asynchronous discussion boards, but few developed applied teaching models (Hammond, 2005). So, how do we structure discussions to better engage students and encourage participation? Several researchers have offered recommendations.

1. Create clear expectations for discussions (Blecher et al., 2015; Goshtasbpour et al., 2022; Simon, 2018) including identifying what is rewarded and valued (Ambrose et al., 2010)
2. Offer discussion board alternatives such as optional live discussion (Simon, 2018), collaborating on a wiki (Mintz, 2020) or submitting posts as an assignment rather than discussion post (Farrell, 2021).
3. Clarify instructor role and provide feedback and coaching (Blecher et al., 2015; Dixson et al., 2006; Goshtasbpour et al., 2022; Simon, 2018;). Ambrose et al. (2010) describe this as providing early opportunities for success and targeted feedback.
4. Track participation and provide rubrics for grading (Rossman, 1999).
5. Create better prompts (Mintz, 2020) such as questions students and instructors care about (Simon, 2018) and connecting material to student’s interests (Ambrose et al., 2010).

6. Use discussion leaders and limit the number of students in a discussion group (), what Mintz (2020) describes as raising the stakes.
7. Ask students to do something, rather than simply pose a question (Mintz, 2020)
8. Provide guidance on how to select posts to respond to (Goshtasbpour et al., 2022)
9. Offer alternative means of expression including different modes of contribution in addition to public discussion posts (Farrell, 2018)

While creating multiple formats for grading a single assignment may not be feasible for large, online sections, it does encourage moving outside the incentivization/punishment model, drawing on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) guidelines for providing multiple means of engagement, representation, action and expression, something Bata (2022) also recommends for TiLTing online learning.

This literature provided an overview of TiLT and its usefulness for online teaching to support deep learning and student success. Description of implementation and impact on student performance and perceptions addresses Hammond's (2005) call for more applied models of teaching related to asynchronous discussion. Therefore, the question guiding this research is: How has the use of TILT in a course redesign impacted student engagement, including evidence of deep learning and performance, in asynchronous discussion boards?

Instructional Redesign and Action Research

This study utilized action research, a process of looking, thinking, and acting on a problem or issue (Stringer & Ortiz Aragon, 2021) to address the question of how using TILT in course redesign impacted student engagement in asynchronous discussions. This approach is appropriate given Stringer's (2007) assertion of the importance of "detailed description of the context(s), activities, and events that are reported as part of the outcomes of the study" (p. 59) in action research in responses to Hammond's (2005) call for more applied teaching models. This study began by noticing issues related to online discussion performance. After completing instructional redesign during summer 2021 using TiLT to redesign online discussions, data were collected from the subsequent two semesters to assess the changes by comparing student performance, identifying themes in student responses and exploring how the strategies for supporting meaningful inquiry and student engagement worked. Additional changes to the course were subsequently made based on these findings, many of which are presented throughout the paper, continuing the action research cycle of look, think, act.

Context

"Criticizing Television" is a three-credit hour undergraduate art education course that fulfills two GE requirements: cultural diversity and second-level writing. Six to 14 sections of this course are offered each semester, both in-person and online, and enrollment is capped at 25 students. The course is taught by faculty, lecturers, and graduate teaching associates. Subsequently, much of the content and structure of the course is standardized across sections, including the grading scheme. The online section is asynchronous and structured into weekly

modules on Canvas, the Learning Management System (LMS). Each module begins with a weekly overview page introducing the topic, content and activities through video and text. The modules also include a writing and research lesson, two to three assigned readings and/or viewings, a learning check, and a discussion. There are three formal writing assignments on topics related to television criticism. The weekly discussions make up 30% of the student grade, forming a backbone to the course structure.

Participants

This study examined selected coursework from four sections of “Criticizing Television” between spring 2021 and spring 2022 with 94 total enrolled students (24, 22, 25, and 23 respectively). Students enrolled in the class are typically non-major students (89.5% of students completing SEIs for this course during the period of study reported that the primary reason for taking this class was that it fulfilled a GE requirement) and often take the class as juniors or seniors despite it being a 2000-level course. No additional demographic information was documented.

Methods

The data collected for this study included student work typically assigned and completed in the course. All data were compiled anonymously and identified only by semester after final grades were submitted. This study was approved as exempt by the researcher’s Institutional Review Board. Data included:

1. SEI scores and comments from before and after the instructional redesign (spring 2021 through spring 2022)
2. Student responses from an ungraded midterm check-in survey during and after instructional redesign (summer 2021 through spring 2022)
3. Student responses to two discussion boards and average grades from before and after the instructional redesign (spring 2021, autumn 2021 and spring 2022)

Instruments

The midterm check-in was completed anonymously. Survey response rates from spring 2021 through spring 2022 were 95.83%, 95.45%, 100%, and 82.61%, respectively. The survey included the following questions:

1. Are you having any issues with the course technology?
2. What is the most important thing you’ve learned so far this semester?
3. Is there anything I can do to make this class better?
4. Is there anything I can do to make our student/teacher relationship better?
5. Which has been the most useful material provided to you so far this semester, and why?
6. What is one thing you’ve learned or practiced in this class that you’ve applied beyond this class?

The midterm check-in for summer 2021 asked an additional question to assist in the instructional redesign:

Tell me your thoughts about the discussions. Are the prompts engaging? Are the expectations clear and reasonable? Is the feedback from your classmates helpful to your thinking about the weekly topic and/or your writing? In an ideal world, what would this part of the class (weekly engagement with different ideas on television) look like for you?

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using a layered analysis approach (Keifer-Boyd, 2013) and involved color coding two discussion boards (including threads and responses) and student responses to the midterm check-in survey. These codes were then reassembled in conversation with the literature. For example, to explore deep learning in diverse types of discussion board responses (a practice discussion typically assigned during week nine and a criticism discussion typically assigned during week 11) I began by highlighting places of repetition and interest. From there, I noticed that highlighted areas loosely corresponded with the indicators of deep learning presented in Aderibigbe (2021, p. 4), and I returned to the data to look more carefully for places where students asked questions, offered feedback, extended ideas, connected to readings/viewings, and related to past experience. This was then organized into a chart counting frequency per type of response. Student responses to the midterm check-ins were coded according to what was identified by students as important or impactful. These were then categorized according to which aspect of the class was addressed. These were again organized into a chart calculating frequency. These frequencies of codes were then layered with highlighted examples, student performance measures (report of average discussion board scores), and notes of my own perceptions of the quality of work presented in relation to previous terms. Finally, I utilized these findings to make further changes to the course, continuing the action research cycle. The themes that emerged from this process are presented and discussed in the findings section.

The Interventions

In summer 2021, three initial elements of discussion redesign were implemented to better articulate the learning objectives and expectations. These included:

1. Adding explicit expectations in the discussion guidelines that students reply to all comments left on their post, explaining: “I require replies to comments left on your work to establish a baseline of gratitude for your peers taking the time to read, think and respond to your work.”
2. More explanation of discussion rationale in the first week’s announcements.
3. Adding a mini-criticism focused discussion, which was an adaptation of a formal paper assignment to accommodate the shift from a 15-week semester to 6-week summer term. The discussion response guidelines asked students to provide feedback on the writing of the discussion post in addition to discussing the content, becoming an informal peer

review. Though not directly informed by TiLT at this stage of the intervention, the addition of writing feedback into the discussion response expectations became a crucial element of rethinking the purpose of discussions.

Following student feedback on these initial interventions and utilizing TiLT, I rewrote the discussion guidelines in autumn 2021 to clarify the purpose of and expectations for each discussion as follows:

The purpose of discussion boards in this class is to provide a place for students to complete weekly assignments and give feedback to one another. I use discussion forums to complete these assignments to give opportunity to “see other people's ideas and writing styles, for feedback on your writing, and look at television and social issues from a variety of perspectives” (student feedback about the value of discussions, Autumn 2020). There are different types of discussions with different goals.

1. **Practice discussions** ask students to complete an exercise to apply knowledge from the textbook to their own viewing of television. The audience for this writing is primarily the instructor, and feedback from classmates and instructor provides additional insight and questions.
2. **Reflection discussions** ask students to think about their own experiences with writing and television criticism as well as think deeply about what you learned and how you learned it. The audience for this writing is mainly yourself, and feedback from classmates and instructor provide additional insight and questions. These can be written or video/audio recordings.
3. **Criticism discussions** ask students to apply the frameworks and lessons from class to their own television viewing to persuade their peers about an idea or to watch the show. The audience for this writing is your peers. Feedback from classmates and instructor will assist in developing writing as well as contribute additional insight and questions.
4. **Peer Review discussions** ask students to share a draft of their writing assignments and give feedback to their peers. (Smith, 2021a)

Finally, I added the discussion guidelines to the “Getting Started” module, which students are required to complete prior to beginning the course, and to the top of corresponding discussion prompts. Clarifying, and then repeating, the purpose for each discussion helped remind students the intent for the activity and how to best utilize the space, an example of redundancy (Bata, 2022), “reduc[ing] the cognitive resources that learners have to expend on tracking course organization” (Eblen-Zayas, 2021, p. 69), and better understanding assignments (Wengier & Dubuisson, 2023).

Findings

Student feedback from the summer 2021 midterm check-in showed that prompts worked well and expectations clearly stated. One student summarized the consensus:

I think that the discussions are a great and reasonable weekly assignment for the course. The expectations are clear and it's great that you force us to engage with our classmates and communicate with them so that we all can improve together. I like how you give us choice for the topic and prompts we are almost interested in to write about. They always make me think outside of the box, too, which is nice. I think that these assignments are ideal and give us all the opportunity to better our writing skills while discussing important topics with our peers.

Students shared ways that discussions contributed to their learning in the course. Some mentioned the feedback provided in the peer responses. For others, the discussions provided accountability for the course materials, one student commenting in the autumn 2021 midterm check-in that “writing [my discussion post] causes me to read more, understand the concepts, and apply them to my own experiences.” This feedback confirmed the need for reconsidering and better defining the purpose of discussion board assignments beyond a replacement for face-to-face conversation.

Discussions increased in importance for students. Before and during redesign, few students identified discussions as the most important material presented in class (13.04% in spring 2021 and 14.29% in summer 2021). After redesign, most students (56% in autumn 2021 and 68.42% in spring 2022) identified discussions as the most important material. Students identified several varied reasons for this, including:

- The opportunity to give and receive feedback on their writing from peers as well as instructor, which “helps me improve my writing for future assignment.”
- Exposure to different perspectives on the same topic.
- The opportunity to practice writing skills and apply the lessons in a more informal space.
- The opportunity to apply the lessons about analyzing TV, including theory and production elements.

From the midterm check-in responses and discussion boards, I found significant ways that TiLT, specifically the strategies of articulating learning goals and rationale and providing grading rubrics and detailed expectations, improved student performance, and engagement on discussion boards.

Clear Guidelines and Expectations Promote Student Success by Establishing Clear Patterns of Engagement

In the summer 2021 midterm check-in, students expressed confusion about discussion deadlines and demonstrated performance orientation toward discussions. For example, one student complained in the spring 2021 SEI comments that “points were taken for the smallest of errors and I felt as if I had to do things the instructor's way or I would lose points. This made it

impossible to actually learn and enjoy the class.” These comments prompted me to write more transparent and explicit grading practices to clarify expectations for class participation. Previously, I only communicated how much the discussions are worth (5 points) and that students would lose points for not meeting expectations. In autumn 2021, I expanded the discussion guidelines grading section as follows:

How will your blog posts and discussion contributions be scored?

These are participation points (5 points). Participation is 30% of your total grade (so each discussion is roughly 2% of your grade). No discussion posts are accepted after the posted deadline.

Discussions are graded as follows:

- Initial discussion post submitted on time (1 point)
- Discussion post follows prompt instructions (1 point)
- References all assigned readings and viewings (1 point)
- Peer responses (2 points)

So, if you were to submit a discussion prompt, but did not reference the assigned readings, you would earn 4/5 points. If you submitted a discussion post and no peer responses (and 2 were required), you would earn 3/5 points. (Smith, 2021a)

In addition to clarifying the criteria, I began offering more substantial feedback using submission comments during the first few weeks of the semester. This provided many opportunities for students to acclimate to the expectations and make changes to their performance, something Ambrose et al. (2010), Goshtasbpour et al. (2022), and Simon (2018) encourage. I utilized the following messaging to explain why students lost participation points and how students could fulfill the discussion expectations:

To receive full credit for future discussion, please do the following:

- Submit the initial post by the deadline to give your peers adequate time to read and respond.
- Reference all assigned readings and viewings. This is your opportunity to engage with the assigned readings and viewing. References do not need to be formal, but it is a good opportunity to practice APA citation formatting.
- Respond to 2 peer posts and to all comments left on your post.

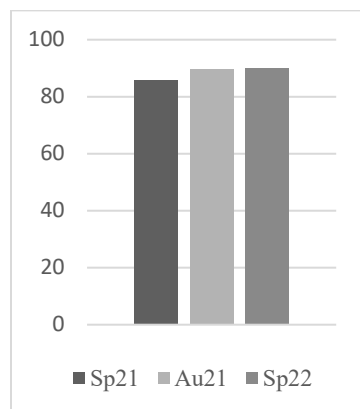
Review the Discussion Guidelines posted in the Getting Started module for further information about post requirements. (Smith, 2021b)

This resulted in an overall trend of student grades improving and plateauing the remainder of the semester. In addition, I received fewer questions about lost points. Clearer

description of participation expectations, creation of a rubric, and repeated reference back to this rubric in assignment comments mitigated student confusion and led to student performance increase between spring 2021 and spring 2022 as seen in Figure 1.

Figure 3

Discussion Board Participation Score Averages



Two unexpected outcomes from these changes emerged. First, while almost all students stated that the discussion expectations were clear, not all students met them. On average, 72.73% of students in summer 2021 lost one or more points on the weekly discussion. One student who frequently lost points also shared in the autumn 2021 midterm check-in, “I love your discussions because the directions are pretty clear. Also my classmate responses are helpful and they get me thinking.” This was a surprise. While it reiterated the importance of clear expectation guidelines and a grading rubric to create a baseline for participation and provide consistent feedback, I realized not all students will meet these expectations. This may occur for many reasons, and the role of an online instructor is to provide clear and repeated explanation of expectations so that students know how to improve their efforts (Bata, 2022; Belcher et al., 2015; Dixson et al., 2006; Rossman, 2019; Wengier & Dubuisson, 2023). This might take the form of explaining that peer responses provide opportunities to learn about different perspectives and receive valuable feedback on writing or sharing that by not taking advantage of reading and responding to peer posts deprives the student and the class of that contribution. Moreover, the comment was an important reminder that while students may not meet expectations laid out in the assignment guidelines, they may still be engaging with the materials in meaningful but less visible ways as Shi et al. (2023) also found.

Another unexpected outcome was a focus on the transferability of discussion etiquette. One intervention required students to reply to all peer comments on their initial discussion posts, about which one student commented in the summer 2021 midterm check-in: “I like that we are encouraged to reply to comments on our posts. I do not think I have been asked to do this in previous classes.” In the autumn 2021 and spring 2022 midterm check-in, 12% and 5.26% students respectively also identified discussion skills as something they applied outside of the course, including writing better posts and how to provide feedback to classmates. Not all students are prepared for online communication and providing a framework for how to engage

with peers online helps “[foster] learners’ capability to engage in online discussion [and] contribute to [a] successful learning experience” (Han & Hall, 2019, p. 47). TiLT encourages students to reflect on how they learn, and this includes the way they engage in discussions, which is especially significant when transferred to other academic contexts.

Modeling Patterns of Engagement

A key assumption of TiLT is that “transparent expectations combined with transparent assignments contribute to enhanced student engagement and academic achievement” (Howard et al., 2020, p. 199). In autumn 2021, I added specific peer response guidelines for peer review discussions. The new guidelines asked students to attach a file with track changes and use the 3-2-1 Model of Feedback to craft their responses, which included three suggestions for improvement, two interesting points, and one good question. Previously, I instructed students to provide specific and detailed feedback and suggested attaching a file with track changes. Only 40.91% of students attached at least one track changed document in their two required peer reviews. After adding explicit expectations, the peer review responses were more comprehensive. In autumn 2021 and spring 2022, 79.17% and 85% of students respectively attached two files. One student shared,

I was surprised to find that I was able to improve my own essay through peer editing other people’s essays, too. I think going through those papers looking for specific fixes made me realize I was making a lot of the same mistakes in my own paper that I might not have caught otherwise.

Moreover, two students specifically mentioned the 3-2-1 Model Feedback in the midterm check-in as something that they have used beyond the class. One student wrote,

I’ve adapted what I’ve learned in this class into the way I peer review assignments when a friend [asks] me to. I am more concise about ways that they could improve on their point or reasons why I am [confused].

Like the peer review discussions, criticism discussions focused on providing feedback in response to peers helped students prepare their formal papers. In a typical criticism discussion such as the one assigned in week eleven, nearly every peer response provided feedback on the writing and content of the post. Before clarifying the purpose of this discussion to include practicing analytical writing skills, applying the research and writing lessons, and including feedback as an element of response requirements, only 2.17% of responses in spring 2021 included any kind of feedback on writing. After the intervention, 89.58% peer responses in autumn 2021 and 88.10% in spring 2022 included feedback. More significant was that this feedback referenced specific writing elements discussed in the weekly writing and research lessons. Students shared that participation increased in the discussions, they learned from the varying perspectives of their peers, and gave them “ideas to think about for future writing assignments” through the process of giving and receiving feedback. Curiously, 17.78% of student responses in autumn 2021 and spring 2022 specifically related feedback to the discussion prompt guidelines such as connecting to the assigned readings or bolding the thesis statement.

By and large, clarifying the purpose of various kinds of discussions and providing the 3-2-1 Model of Feedback helped students develop their ability to engage with peers' posts. However, not all discussions were designed to give and receive feedback. In the practice discussion in week nine, 52.27% peer responses in autumn 2021 continued providing feedback on writing even though this was not explicitly required in the response expectations. In addition, only 52.27% of student responses expanded on an idea. Before the addition of the feedback requirement, 95.34% of student responses took an idea from the peer post and connected it to the assigned readings, their own choice viewing, personal experience, or other resources. While this attention to practicing writing skills met the learning objective of this second level writing course, it did so at the cost of critical engagement with the weekly topics.

Based on these observations, I concluded that students caught on to the feedback response pattern and added guidelines for discussion response requirements following the Spring 2022 course iteration to establish a clearer pattern of engagement that emphasized students' critical engagement first and writing feedback second:

1. **Reflect.** Choose an idea or question from your peer's post to reflect on. This is more than "I agree with...". If you agree (or disagree), why? What is your experience with this idea? How might you interpret it differently?
2. **Connect.** Make specific connections to the readings, shows, and other resources (include links where relevant) to offer other perspectives and interpretations, or to deepen the analysis.
3. **Question.** Ask the author questions about their ideas.
4. **Provide Feedback.** Please use the 3-2-1 model of feedback. (Smith, 2022)

Anecdotally, over two semesters of teaching with this addition, the response patterns have focused more on engagement of ideas and less on providing specific writing feedback. Clear guidelines promote patterns of participation that support the desired engagement for the learning community and learning objectives for the course.

Evidence of Deep Learning Because of Requiring Questions and Replies

Student performance does not necessarily indicate meaningful engagement as found with the student who consistently performed poorly according to their grade but indicated that discussions "got [them] thinking." One goal for rethinking discussion boards was to set them up to maximize the potential for deep learning. Looking at the ways in which the response guidelines shared in the previous section encouraged deep learning, I returned to the indicators shared by Aderibigbe (2021), including

an intention to understand material for oneself, vigorous and critical interaction with knowledge content, relating ideas to one's previous knowledge and experience, discovering and using organizing principles to integrate ideas, relating evidence to conclusions, [and] examining the logic of arguments. (Aderibigbe, 2021, p. 4)

Overall, initial discussion posts following redesign were not any more or less substantial than previous semesters. However, the impact of the interventions appeared in the quality of engagement with their peers through required responses, revealed in discussions as recognizing different perspectives, asking questions, and reflection.

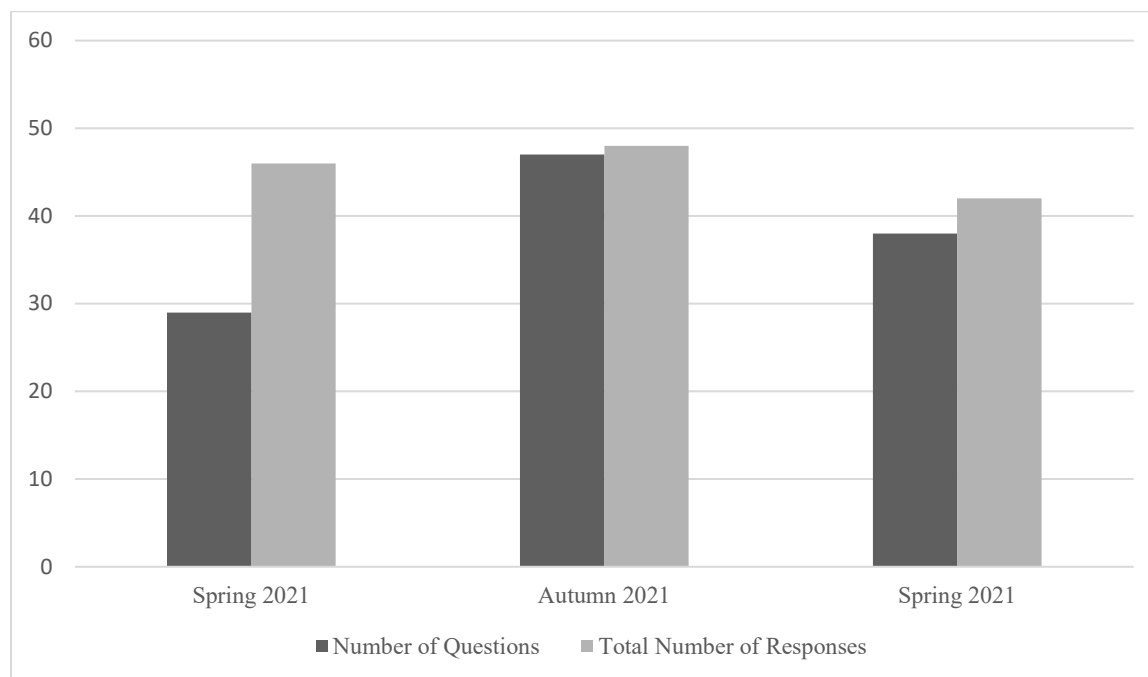
Different Perspectives

Students appreciated reading and criticizing their classmate's posts and hearing about different perspectives. One student shared in the midterm check-in how they "once wrote a discussion on the same topic with my classmates, but we have different conclusions, but I still agree with her answer, but we choose different angles to answer." Another student shared multiple times throughout the course about a particular peer's post that was transformative in their thinking and spurred a reconsideration of the values leading to different interpretations of the same television show. These examples provide evidence of deep learning, in which students explore "different points of view, extending and expanding current understanding" (Han & Hall, 2019, p. 41) and recognize the logic behind arriving at different conclusions. The opportunity to explore different perspectives supports one of the course learning outcomes: "Explore and problematize a diversity of perspectives on television in American life, placing your personal experiences with television within a broad social and scholarly context" (Smith, 2021c).

The focus on different perspectives also promotes increased engagement with peers. One student shared in the autumn 2021 midterm check-in that "I am often surprised when reading other comments and I wonder what else the person thought about regarding the topic." Another student shared in spring 2022, "I often read more than just two of my peers' posts and the extent of differing ideas and opinions is very interesting. People can come up with such complex, good stuff" supporting Wengier and Dubuisson's (2023) finding that TiLT helps establish and sustain community of inquiry.

Asking Questions

The peer response guidelines asked students to share a question and reply to comments left on their initial post, a change that supported increased deep learning indicators in peer responses. One challenge to implementing the requirement for replies to comments was that the LMS did not send notifications when a comment was made on a user's post; notifications were only sent when a comment has been made on the discussion board. Many students did not know that peers had commented on their post. However, there was an overall increase in the questions included in peer discussion comments as seen in Figure 3. Sixty-six percent of students on average replied to at least one comment left by a peer on their initial post. In these replies, students tended to extend an idea or connect to the assigned readings, viewings, or other individual experiences in a new way. While a "check-list mentality" seemed evident in many students' responses, the requirement to ask questions and reply to peer comments encouraged students to break the responses into multiple steps, including considering a different perspective, asking a question, and then answering those posed to them.

Figure 4*Questions Included in Peer Discussion Comments*Reflection

Reflection discussions were designed specifically to focus on reflecting on learning or previous experiences, a strategy suggested by Ambrose et al. (2010) to support deeper learning. In autumn 2021, I rewrote the week one reflection discussion prompt to emphasize goal setting and personal interests. Then, I asked students to return to this post to review the goals they set and how they worked towards them over the course of the semester in the final reflection discussion. Another reflection discussion asked students to apply their analysis for the week to reflect on how their experiences with television shaped their views of the world. Integrating these reflection opportunities in discussions as well as learning check quizzes further connected the disparate elements of the class. Students clearly articulated both challenges and successes in the midterm check-in. In autumn 2021 and spring 2022, 68% and 68.42% of students respectively identified specific aspects of the class and/or student teacher relationship such as structure, feedback, multiple examples of lesson, and communication that contributed to their satisfaction with the class. This reflective practice cultivated a supportive learning environment, which Ambrose et al. (2010) cite as a principal element of student success.

Discussion

This research is not definitive due to the limitations of a single instructor, single course action research study. While the purpose of action research study is primarily to create change for a specific community, in this case, the teaching practice of a single instructor benefiting students of a single course, there are some important transferable findings. These include

detailed descriptions of specific interventions related to asynchronous discussion design that can be adapted to other teaching contexts. Moreover, this narrative of redesign interventions and student feedback and outcomes joins Wengier and Dubuisson (2023) as an example of how TiLT can guide online course design, specifically supporting asynchronous discussion design and facilitation. Additional studies exploring the implementation and impact of TiLT in online learning for both students and teachers are needed on a larger scale.

This study asked how the use of TiLT in a course redesign improved student engagement in asynchronous discussions. Not only did student performance improve with the interventions described, but increased student engagement through asking and responding to questions and indicators of deep learning were presented. Overall, I found that defining an intentional use of discussion boards (to reflect, practice skills, offer peer review, or engage in criticism) supported deep learning. Clearly articulated guidelines and expectations for assignments, repeated in multiple places throughout the course, helped students better engage with those activities, improved student performance, and alleviated issues observed in previous iterations of the course. While clear guidelines did not guarantee a high level of critical engagement or maximum student performance, they established patterns of student engagement with the course. Additional research on how guidelines establish patterns of student engagement across multiple courses is needed to further generalize these findings.

Though this study focused on student performance with TiLT informed interventions, the role of the instructor was vital to the success of their implementation. Students appreciated instructor participation in the discussion board and feedback in the grading comments. These interpersonal variables support course design, suggesting that while the TiLT framework is an important element of equitable education, it must be backed with instructor presence and support. Further study of instructor role in teaching a TiLTed course is needed, building on studies such as Dixson et al. (2006).

Finally, these findings support those that indicate that transparent teaching online contributes to student success (Bata, 2022; Howard et al., 2020; Wengier & Dubuisson, 2023). None of these studies, including this one, are longitudinal or span multiple teaching contexts. However, students' identification of transferable skills and qualitative evidence suggests there is impact beyond an individual class. Providing opportunities for reflection on learning, including goal setting and application of course content and skills beyond the course, help extend student success in an individual course to other contexts, and would be worth further consideration in future studies.

Declarations

The author has no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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