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Participant perspectives informing pedagogy for asynchronous online discussion in initial teacher education

Unpublished Ed.D thesis, Faculty of Education, The University of Waikato

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This study looks at how students and staff experience asynchronous online discussion (AOD) within initial teacher education. The aim is to explore participant perspectives, including expectations of fellow participants, with a view to informing pedagogy, defined as the relationship between teaching and learning (Loughran, 2006).

The underpinning argument is essentially that learning and teaching can be enhanced by awareness of how participants experience the situation. Understanding the complexities of AOD entails a better understanding of participants' tacit reasoning, expectations, misunderstandings, and responses to tasks and behaviours (Brookfield & Preskill, 2005; Loughran, 2006). It is the situation as it is perceived which is central to the quality of teaching and learning, and this puts participants and their experiences at the centre of efforts to improve pedagogy and to enhance deep learning.

This study is framed by sociocultural theory and phenomenography to explore AOD through the eyes of teacher educators and teacher education students in a specific teacher education context. Participants engaged in focus groups (face-to-face and online) and a series of semi-structured interviews, generating data about experiences and perspectives of AOD.

Key findings show the need for participants in AOD to establish expectations for purposeful communication; to maintain a presence for learning premised on formative interaction; and to work together in ways conducive to community and student leadership in pursuit of deep learning.

This thesis adds to the limited research literature on teacher perceptions about online teaching (Spector, 2007), and makes a contribution to addressing the neglect of student approaches to study in higher education using eLearning technologies for discussion (Ellis et al., 2008; Jackson et al., 2010; Sharpe et al., 2010). The results contribute to knowledge in the field of online learning in initial teacher education by giving rise to specific pedagogical strategies for teachers and students in given situations, and by providing conceptual tools for participants when thinking about teaching and learning through AOD.



Participant experiences function as footprints, picking out pathways as others make their way through AOD (Salmon, 2002).