

Developing a Framework for Student-led Resource Sharing and Discussion

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Student-led Resource Share Discussion Framework: AAD 150: Arts in Action

AAD 150, or “Arts in Action,” is designed to introduce students to the many intersections of the arts and the world around them. The course is designed for first-year, pre-arts administration majors but many arts majors in a variety of disciplines frequently choose this course as an elective. For spring 2022, the semester we describe here, three out of 24 students were arts administration majors. Kathryn Mullen served as the primary instructor for the course, and Michael Pritchard the teaching assistant; our process was collaborative.

Over the course of 15 weeks in Arts in Action, students explore how the arts relate to and influence identity, community development, education, healthcare, military, activism, innovation, and more. When covering such a wide breadth of topics in the arts, many of which connect to personal aspects of our students’ lives, we wanted to create a sense of community, and, ultimately, as safe a space as possible for students to share and learn from the multitude of perspectives of their peers in the classroom. In other words, we wanted students to have the necessary time, space, and autonomy to gather, share, and discuss relevant arts administration resources that are connected to their own experiences, perspectives, or values, while minimizing the social and emotional risk that can be inherent in sharing one’s personal perspective.

Given that this was one of the first in-person courses many students had participated in since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, we also needed to help students transition from the online classroom to the in-person classroom. In the following notes, we will outline the development of classroom-created community guidelines and a series of hybrid format discussions (combining in-person and online modalities) we developed in order to meet those

needs. We will discuss relevant research, further analyze the problem, and share the results of our experience.

Literature Review

Many instructors within higher education have not adopted new principles of inclusive design and instructional design developed for online education, instead structuring online courses and content in a manner similar to their face-to-face courses (Baldwin et al. 2018). However, there is evidence to suggest that utilizing technology in and around the higher education classroom produces a more productive educational experience for today's students (Tapscott, 2006, Whitaker et. al., 2016; Henderson et. al., 2017). Creative new methodologies, such as learning management systems, hybrid learning and shared classroom management software have been used to facilitate more efficient and collaborative communication in the modern, digital age of teaching. These methodologies have rapidly developed since the turn of the 21st century, necessitating that instructors regularly assess and build upon their teaching strategies.

University students using integrated and seamless learning resources in a course through a digital medium generally report higher satisfaction rates with their university experience overall, regardless of the physical or digital location of the course. (Wharton and Pritchard, 2020). Abuhassna et al. (2020) identified the importance of supporting integrated, well-designed online courses and content in the modern age. In the Arts in Action course, we regularly utilized Google Workspace as a collaborative, all-in-one platform for consolidating and sharing resources, even prior to the implementation of the teaching strategies explored in this article. Google Workspace is the University of Kentucky Department of Arts Administration's go-to for student work because the faculty find it intuitive to use, accessible for online collaboration, and it can be easily integrated into Canvas, an online learning management system used by both online

and in-person courses to organize material and engage students. As we transitioned back to in-person classwork after the remote-only period at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, we sought to aid students who had grown accustomed to communicating with peers only remotely in transitioning back to the physical space.

The Challenge

Up until the Fall 2021 semester, many of the students who took Arts in Action experienced college only online, where class discussions have been across screens or in written format. Upon joining the in-person classroom, we observed that many students showed hesitancy in engaging in class discussions. One of the key skills we wanted the students to develop was their critical analysis of the assigned readings. We felt it was essential for students to share (and benefit from their peers sharing) what they found most important from the readings, what they agreed or disagreed with, and what they felt might be missing from the classroom conversation. In other words, we asked students to share what perspectives, applications, and intersections of ideas we, the instructors, may not have brought up that students felt should be considered, in turn fostering a greater inclusivity of voices within the classroom.

Another skill we wanted the students to learn was finding and evaluating sources. To that end, we connected these two areas of skill development by assigning students to use the internet or library resources to search for and identify resources (texts, podcasts, videos, etc.) exploring perspectives or voices on a topic that they (the students) felt were missing, yet were also critical to the conversation.

Next, we wanted students to practice verbalizing their reasoning. We wanted them to put into words why they selected a particular resource; why it was essential to the particular topic at hand; what questions they had or discoveries they experienced; and lastly, what conclusions they

could “take away” from this collaborative exploration with peers. These kinds of discussions are an essential component for students to meet the learning objectives of 1) discussing the role and value of the arts in modern society and 2) investigating the presence and meaning of the arts in their own lives. In response to this challenge, we created a two-phase framework:

1. **Drafting of classroom-led community guidelines**, to facilitate the development of a safer space, and create a system for more compassionate communication and accountability.
2. **Establishment of online discussion board frameworks**, to create multiple points of communication, and provide students the time and space to share their perspectives through the identification and explanation of supporting evidence.

Development of Community Guidelines

When seeking to create a classroom that would safely facilitate complex conversations that would be likely to result in meaningful discourse, we reached out to the Center for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT) at the University of Kentucky for guidance. Following their advice, we created a set of Community Guidelines for our classroom.

The students drafted and edited together as a class. We started with the instructor providing examples, asking guiding questions, soliciting student ideas, then documenting those ideas. This method was modeled after an existing model, outlined in the Guidelines for Classroom Interactions from the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching at the University of Michigan (2022).

Example guidelines students in Arts in Action created as a class included:

1. **Keep an open mind:** and be open to changing your mind.

2. **Respect each other's identity:** With regard to pronouns, if you notice a mistake, especially about a classmate, gently correct the pronoun use. If you make a mistake, acknowledge, correct and move forward.
3. **Don't start unnecessary fires:** we're not here to argue, we're here to grow together.
4. **Understand that opinions are fluid:** they can change over time, including mid-discussion.

A statement was added as an introduction to the document opening lines of communication and stating that the Community Guidelines would be a “living document” and could continue to develop throughout the semester. After the Community Guidelines draft was completed, edited, and approved by the class, it was posted permanently to the top of the weekly Modules page in Canvas, and printed copies were dispensed to all students.

Hybrid Resource-Share Discussion

Over the last two years, students and instructors have evolved to become increasingly flexible and willing to transition to and move between the virtual classroom, and the in-person classroom. This fluidity of the classroom “space” has resulted in greater opportunities for students to communicate using various methods that best facilitate their learning and sharing.

Utilizing this concept of fluid classroom space to promote diverse learning opportunities (Raes et al., 2020), our assignment requires students to transition from the in-person to the online classroom throughout the week, including structured sharing in an online discussion board, preparing them for small-group and class-wide conversations. In Canvas we set up discussion boards where students would share and comment on the resources they found through their research process in groups of three to four students. The size of the discussion groups was

chosen to be big enough to create a sense of accountability, but small enough to encourage deeper discussions through a more intimate group. See the Appendix for a sample of how this was structured in Spring 2022.

Outcomes

In the previous semester's iteration of the Arts in Action course, which we also taught together, students were provided with required readings, then engaged in follow-up discussions and related classroom activities as guided by the professor and teaching assistant. By comparison, in the semester in which the community guidelines and resource share discussion framework were implemented, we observed that students seemed much better prepared and empowered to contribute than in prior sections of this course in previous semesters.

Students seemed to be more alert and engaged in conversations in the following classes. After the first week of this assignment series, one student sent an email to the primary instructor, providing the following feedback:

"I really enjoyed class today! I felt really connected to the other students, being able to talk about our different takes on the identity assignment and how we felt about different topics. I hope we have discussions like these more in the future!"

The student went on to share a preference in language regarding the use of the term "disabled" as opposed to the phrase "differently abled", illustrating a step forward in creating a safer and more accountable space within and around the classroom. This was reinforced by the ability to reference sourced and documented research and evidence in their online forum posts, ensuring the accuracy and currentness of the information they wanted to discuss. Our goals of skill-building around critical reading and research skills were met to a greater extent than in

previous semesters that did not use these new tactics. We attribute this improved engagement to the changes we describe above.

Moving forward, we intend to continue to develop the research assignment, process of developing community guidelines, and others like it, for students to increasingly benefit from knowledge sharing and community building in the classroom. A piece of advice we would offer to instructors through this experience is to celebrate small wins, as this collaborative learning is a shift in pedagogical perspective. We also hope to continue incorporating the ideas shared through teaching resource-shares, such as these teaching notes. If you have ideas or experiences that you feel add context or could further improve this discussion strategy, or if you have other comments or questions, please email at kspell2@uky.edu; we are always glad to learn (and share) together with you!

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Appendix A:

Sample Schedule

Below is a sample schedule of a Hybrid Resource Share Discussion in AAD 150:

1. **Monday's in-person class (10-10:50am):** Instructor introduces a topic in the classroom. Brief instructor led class discussion.
2. **Online, by class-time Wednesday (9:59am):** Each student finds and shares one resource, which they consider essential to the new topic. These could include articles, book chapters, podcasts, or videos. Students share this one, carefully selected resource, and explain why it is important to the discussion at hand. Individually, this begins to frame the topic for students.
3. **Online, by class-time Friday (9:59am):** Each student reads and responds to the resources shared by *each* of the classmates in their discussion. They are asked to respond with a **thought, question, and epiphany** (Gonzalez, 2018)
4. **Friday's in-person class (first 30 minutes, from 10-10:30am):** Students begin in small groups, and discuss their thoughts, questions, and epiphanies. They can discuss the reading at large, or unpack and answer particular questions. The students have autonomy in these conversations. The only requirement for the conversation is that, by 10:35, they

should have determined 3 takeaways that they feel, as a group, are essential to the class understanding of the particular topic.

5. **Friday's in-person class (last 20 minutes, from 10:30-10:50):** Groups share their key takeaways with the class. This provides an opportunity for students to build confidence by practicing vocalizing ideas that they've, at this point, practiced formulating and communicating ideas about at three separate points.

Appendix B: Sample Discussion Prompt

Art and Identity: Resource Share

Background:

This week, as we begin to take a deeper look into the relationship between arts and identity, we'll be exploring how art can shape and inform identity, and how it can communicate or symbolize important components of identity.

When we talk about identity, we begin by looking inward. We asked questions like, how has art shaped your identity? How does art help you to communicate your identity? After looking inward, we'll look at the identities around us, including individuals, organizations, and communities.

Step 1:

To start this exploration, each of you is asked to search for resources that speak to the intersection of the arts and identity. Use a search engine, and try different search terms to sift through possible options. Visit the UKY library page and explore the available resources! Note that if you use the most basic search terms (arts and identity) you'll find an overwhelmingly large number of results.

To narrow your search, try to hone in on a particular facet or areas of interest.

Articles, academic texts, videos, or podcasts are all excellent options. Make sure to consider the author and publisher of your source, to determine if it is reputable.

Step 2:

After searching and reading through resources related to arts and identity, please share:

- A direct link to the resource.
- A brief, but thorough summary of the resource' content.
- A thorough explanation of *why* this resource is important to the discussion of arts and identity.

(Step 2 is due by the start of class (9:59 am), on Wednesday of that week.)

Step 3:

Read and take note of you TQE response to each of your group-members' shared resources.

TQE's refer to *thoughts, questions, and epiphanies*. Within the discussion board, write out at least one of each (one thought, one question, one epiphany, as explained in class) and post them to the discussion board.

This will form the basis of our group discussions in class on Friday, so be sure to have read each resource thoroughly, and have drafted thoughtful TQE's so that you will be able to participate meaningfully in class!

(Step 3 is due by the start of class (9:59 am) on Friday of that week.)