



Discussion Forums: Using The PHdd Strategy

Dr. Michael F. Ryan *Department of Teaching & Learning & Applied Social Science -TUS Midwest (Thurles)*

'PHdd' (Post, Harvest, display & discuss) is an advanced version of the more frequently used 'forum post' with two additional layers that embed learning through a summary display of key ideas posted, followed by an opportunity to discuss them in a subsequent learning episode. The strategy promotes critical thinking, analysis and evaluation.

Summary of Teaching & Learning Context

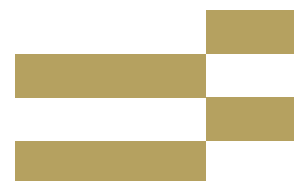
Participants are invited to respond to a learning trigger such as a question and post their response to the 'discussion forum' function in Moodle (or chosen VLE). A word limit can be set as desired. Participants can also be encouraged to respond to the posts of other students. Following a specified period of time (a week), the module leader or nominated student(s) collate a brief summary of key perspectives raised in the discussion thread (harvesting). These perspectives are then presented in a learning episode (tutorial, workshop or integrated into a lecture). The module leader then facilitates a group discussion based on the summary of ideas harvested from the discussion.

This Active Learning strategy can be used with any cohort or any group size. I currently use it with level 9 modules (part of the Post Grad Diploma/MA in Academic Practice Programme). These modules include: Active Learning for Student Engagement and Assessment for engaged learning. The example below is based on an invitation to share one key insight from an introductory reading list on active learning. These ideas were harvested on a power-point slide and then used as a discussion on key ideas. Participants who posted them were invited to expand on the idea chosen and why their chosen idea was a significant one.

Forum Posts Insights: (Post Harvest display & discuss Strategy)

Some Perspective from the Literature

- **Winn, Del Signore, Marcus, Chiell, Freiman, Stafford and Newman (2019)** cognitive learning strategies do embed learning
- **Deslauriers, L., McCarty, L.S., Miller, K., Callaghan, K. and Kestin, G., (2019).** Active Learning requires more cognitive learning and can be tough on students concentration
- **Redmond et als. (2018)** Online engagement framework – very timely and likely to be NB in HE – but requires more development to validate it
- **Dewing (2010, p. 23)** Active Learning improved retention and social transfer of knowledge and skills in Nurse Education
- **Alexandra Pentaraki, G J. Burkholder (2017).** Emotional engagement and the role of pedagogical humour & errors
- **Aji, C.A. and Khan, M.J. (2019)** – The flipped classroom - more challenging to operate in online learning - where students tire from online engagement?
- **Redmond et al (2018)** the online engagement model has inspired a monthly (First Friday) seminar format with post graduate students
- **National Forum Insights (2015)** Why Students Leave: need for better alignment between marketing initiatives and the academic demands of a programme - low entry points & the pressure on staff to engage low ability students
- **Crimmins & Midkiff (2017)** – Better outcomes for weaker students in a highly structured weekly active learning dynamic (weekly assessments)
- **Kane, L (2007)** – The success of Active Learning strategies depends on the assessment processes being used - AL is diluted if we continue to use summative exams?
- **The power of the student** – teacher relationship dynamic & how active learning unfolds in the classroom
- **Canvas 2020 Global Study and Trends.** The definition of student success will...evolve toward a more holistic focus on the student mental well-being, personal development, and career preparation



Brief rationale for why you use this learning approach

Pedagogically, it is a very effective strategy as it challenges the learner to think critically and to respond to a given question, dilemma or viewpoint posed by the module leader, course participant or key theorist. It has the potential to engage learners across five different learning domains: cognitive, social, emotional, behavioural and collaborative (Redmond et.al 2018).

From a student motivation perspective, it engages the learner in many stages of a 'reflective and emergent' conversation. Participants like to see their idea displayed, visually posted and then discussed. The strategy is inclusive and co-constructivist in nature. Every course participant is invited to post a response to a trigger posed. They have time to think before they write and are in turn stimulated by the posts of others on the same theme. The strategy encourages a movement from individual reflection and insight to an informed and emerging 'collective' group conversation. It also enables movement towards 'the flipped classroom' where students take more responsibility for their own learning, thinking and evaluating. In online learning environments, the harvested ideas can also be used as a basis for smaller discussion in break out rooms.

Can it be used for assessment purposes?

Yes, it can be! If you wish to allocate marks for student participation in a module, then discussion forums (using PHdd strategy can be allocated a % of marks - typically 10-15%) but the allocation need not be limited to this allocation - depending on the context and frequency of use.

Implementing the Strategy

Steps you take to organise it and the process involved

- Carefully choose an engaging question arising from a current theme being explored. Post this question or prompt on your VLE (e.g. Moodle – discussion forum' facility).
- Invite students to respond to the initial post (use a word limit that encourages participation).
- If desirable -ask each student to respond to at least one other post by a certain date.
- Moderate the emerging discussion, by scanning across the posts. Select the key points being made, summarise them and display them in a subsequent teaching & learning episode (powerpoint slide or word document). Students could also be asked to do this summarising (on a rotational basis).
- In the subsequent learning episode, display the key points harvested. Thank all those who posted (important here to acknowledge and encourage participation).
- Facilitate a discussion on the emerging conversation. Invite a reaction or response from participants attending the session. If there are perspectives you wish to tease out, invite further comment or clarification from those who posted.
- If there are further perspectives absent -maybe pose a question regarding these.

Your Observations

The impact on student engagement is significant. Participants like to see their viewpoint displayed and discussed. They also appreciate a further opportunity to develop their point or opinion. There is collective learning and in the example displayed earlier, it is a clever way to encourage reading and subsequent discussion of key ideas in the literature or essential reading list.

If you have a small group, it may be possible to acknowledge each participant's post by name. This may not be possible with larger groups, where moderation is time consuming and extracting key points is more appropriate.

Recommended Resources

Redmond, P., Heffernan, A., Abawi, L., Brown, A., & Henderson, R. (2018). *An online engagement framework for higher education*. *Online Learning*, 22(1), 183-204. <https://doi.org/10.24059/olj.v22i1.1175>

Ryan, M.F. (2021).

[LIT Compendium of Active Learning Strategies for Student Engagement, LIT.](#)

