STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY IN ONLINE COURSES

Hosted by Victoria Wyatt
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I am grateful to be speaking to you today from the unceded territories of the Lekwungen peoples.
I respectfully acknowledge that Lekwungen territory is also the site of the University of Victoria, and that the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples continue essential relationships with this land to this day. As current circumstances move us out of physical classrooms, I hope we can use this opportunity to consider ways to decolonize.
STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING COMMUNITY IN ONLINE COURSES

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Rationale for Session

Questioning Community

Discussion
COMMUNITY!

BUT HOW?
MOTIVATION FOR CAFÉ:
COMMUNITY IS KEY...
BUT HOW DOES ONE BUILD IT?

Forums? Breakout Rooms?

Both are unmoderated. I had concerns...

...so I asked a student how to build community.

Photo by William White on Unsplash
WHAT DO INSTRUCTORS MEAN BY COMMUNITY?
WHAT DOES COMMUNITY MEAN TO STUDENTS?
IS COMMUNITY MORE THAN SHARING PERSPECTIVES?

IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CONNECTIONS AND COMMUNITY?
COMMUNITY CANNOT BE CREATED TOP-DOWN.
EVEN ON-LINE, THE HIERARCHY REMAINS

Structures we create are top-down structures.

They do not organically grow from student initiatives.

We remain present in the logistics.
COMMUNITY DOES NOT INCLUDE THE INSTRUCTOR.
IN FACE TO FACE CONTEXTS:

Students can discuss course and instructor without instructor present.

Students have conversations with peers outside of course exercises.
They set up their own communities through social media such as WhatsApp.

They chat with each other in breakout rooms.
Students initiate the group.

Participation is voluntary, and may be active or passive.

Group conversations emerge, representing various perspectives.

Students help each other navigate expectations at university, beyond the specific course.

Students help each other understand course materials and assignments.

When questions remain, a delegate contacts the instructor and reports back.

STUDENT-INITIATED SOCIAL MEDIA:
Opportunities are created by instructor.

There is often a stated curriculum-related purpose for each session.

Time pressure makes conversations more limited. Those that build community rather than connections may take time away from focus on course materials.

[Exception: Desynchronized pods?]
COMMUNITY CANNOT BE GRADED.
EFFECTS OF GRADING:

Participation is not voluntary.

There may be little flexibility to acknowledge different circumstances.

The exercise becomes a burden, obstructing community.
WHAT DOES COMMUNITY MEAN TO STUDENTS?
CONNECTIONS OR COMMUNITY?

Strategies such as forums and breakout rooms build connections.

This is not community, but it may be all we have.

The less of a burden they create, the more they may approximate community.

(This means flexibility, options, acknowledging changing circumstances, recognizing the same strategies may be happening in other courses.)
HOW DO WE SUPPORT COMMUNITY?

Make it clear discussions outside of course contexts are fine. Explain what constitutes unethical conduct.

 Demonstrate that we understand student communities are not homogenous. Design in ways that acknowledge diverse circumstances and that can be flexible if circumstances suddenly change.

 Remember that students may be assigned connection strategies, and may seek to build community, simultaneously in five courses.
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Credit:

Thank you to Marita Wyatt for her conversation and ideas, which served as the foundation for this presentation.