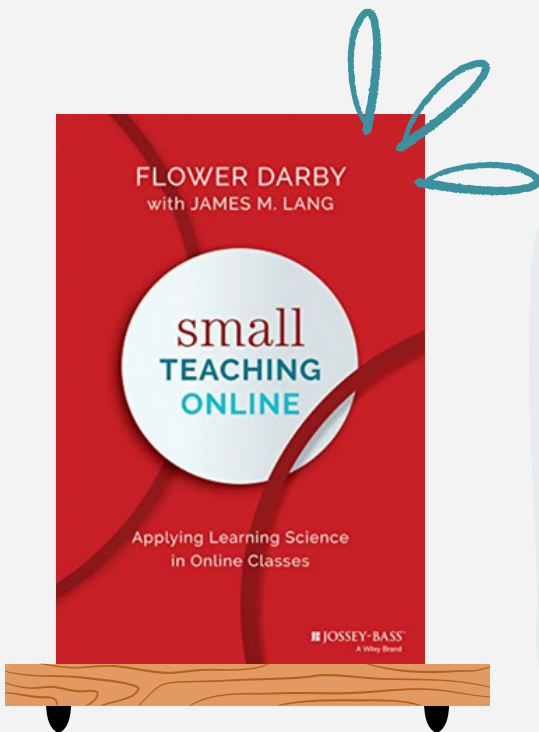


Small Teaching Online

Discussion Guide

The OTL Book Club read and discussed *Small Teaching Online: Applying Learning Science In Online Classes* (Darby & Lang, 2020) in Fall 2020. You can use this document to guide your own reading or start a book club with colleagues. These questions were written by educational developers from the Office of Teaching and Learning at the University of Guelph to help facilitate discussions.



About This Book

Small Teaching Online offers concrete strategies that instructors can implement in their classroom to improve student learning. The authors ground their suggestions in the learning sciences literature. The concept of 'small teaching' encourages instructors to make small but effective changes to their courses that can improve student experience.

Discussion Questions

Introduction



1. The book begins with the metaphor that a poorly-designed online class can seem like an empty classroom with no lights on. What will you do or what could you do to 'turn on the lights and fill the classroom' for your students?
2. The authors argue that an effective online teacher communicates and designs for both empathy and significant learning. What are some ways that you can design your course and communicate with empathy at the forefront?



Discussion Questions

Chapter 1: Designing for Learning

1. The authors suggest that it is important to “keep the rationale for your decisions in full view of your students” (p. 14). Is this type of explicit and transparent rationale-giving part of your teaching practice? Why or why not?
2. The authors discuss the importance of having students reflect on the learning outcomes in your course. How have you or could you incorporate reflection into your course?

Chapter 2: Guiding Learning Through Engagement

1. This chapter includes lots of suggestions for engaging students throughout the course. One suggestion is to breakdown assignments into multiple smaller steps (scaffolding) and incorporate feedback at each step. What are the benefits of breaking down assignments and providing feedback? What are the barriers to doing this?
2. The authors describe the difficulty of assessing student engagement in an online course and suggest some strategies for doing that. In your teaching, how do you determine whether students are engaged? What strategies from the book might you try?

Discussion Questions

Chapter 3: Using Media and Technology Tools

1. The authors point out that multimedia can sometimes detract from learning instead of supporting it (p. 50) and emphasize the need for intentional use of technology. As an instructor, how have you, or how could you, tell if tech is enhancing or distracting from your teaching?
2. The authors describe several potential barriers for students to access media and tech resources (difficult login process, expense, difficult tech, lack of closed-captioning, etc.). In what ways can you make sure that media and tech resources are accessible to all students?

Chapter 4: Building Community

1. According to the community of inquiry framework, effective learning requires presence in 3 key areas: Cognitive presence, Social presence, and Instructor presence. Have you social presence to be difficult to establish when teaching online? How have you intentionally established social presence in online courses?

Chapter 5: Feedback

1. Feedback should be timely, relevant, specific, meaningful, frequent AND part of intentional course design. Why is the last part often forgotten when we design courses?
2. Do you think students intuitively know how to use feedback they receive? How can instructors help students incorporate feedback they receive?

Discussion Questions

Chapter 6: Fostering Student Persistence/Success



1. What strategies do you use to 'nudge' students or gently steer them to wiser decisions in class?
2. Have you ever had a scheduled conversation with your class about how they plan to study for an assessment in your course? Do you think this strategy might be beneficial?

Chapter 7: Creating Autonomy

1. The authors suggest allowing students to self-enroll into groups based on shared interests. What group formation strategies have you tried? What has worked well and what didn't work?
2. Another suggestion in this chapter is to have students annotate, tweak, or co-design the syllabus. What excites you about this idea? What makes you nervous?

Chapter 8: Making Connections



1. The authors cite research showing that when students connect new information to existing knowledge, they are more motivated to learn and more likely to retain the information. How could you replicate this effect in your discipline?
2. How could you incorporate news stories or other real-world references into your courses? Have you ever done this? How do students react to this teaching strategy?



Additional Resources and Suggestions from Book Club Participants

On Autonomy

- For a critical reflection assignment, allow students to choose one of several submission formats (e.g., video, written reflection, podcast, etc.) and include a “choose your own format – consult with professor” – include a common rubric to ensure that students can meet the learning outcomes no matter the format
- Have your students use Perusall.com annotate, comment on, or highlight the syllabus/course outline

On Connecting with Students


- In large courses, create a course-specific email address for students to use to ask questions. It can be monitored by faculty and teaching assistants.
- Give points to students for answering questions correctly in learning management system discussion board

On Assessments

- Pre-assessment idea – give students post-it notes and ask them to record 4 pieces of information they already know about the topic of the course
- Final exam question – essay or short answer question – ask students to choose a theme for the course next year and justify why the theme would be appropriate
- Use the ICE model to guide reading: I = Ideas, C = Connections, E = Extension

On Feedback

- Provide feedback in the following format: WWWNTT – What Went Well, Next Time Try



Small Teaching Online

Suggested Teaching Strategies

Suggested Strategies

***Small Teaching Online* contains a diverse array of strategies to help create a supportive and impactful online classroom environment for your students. Below we have selected a few strategies highlighted in the book alongside their respective page numbers. We encourage you to dive deeper into the book and explore the larger collection of useful strategies and techniques to transform your classroom.**

Strategy

Description

Page

Three Takeaways Assignment	To engage students in a reflective exercise about their accomplishments in class, ask them: What are three things you've learned? how will you continue to learn and develop? and how will this apply to your future goals?	20
Paced, Mini Assignments and Deadlines	Break down complex tasks by giving students a checklist with deadlines that can guide them in completing a large cumulative assignment.	33
Create Short Lecture Videos	To support student engagement create short, informal lecture videos.	52

Short Graded Assignments After Required Videos	Increase student engagement and feedback by adding small auto-graded quizzes after lecture content to check for understanding.	57
Oops Token/Get out of jail Free Card	Establish a caring environment towards student lives by providing 'no questions asked' deadline extensions or opportunities to revise and resubmit.	98
Consider Personal Availability When Setting Assignment Deadlines	When setting deadlines choose them at times you would be available should students have any last minute questions or concerns.	113
Rebrand Office Hours	Find creative ways to rebrand office hours to be more inviting to students. Try calling them 'coffee breaks' or 'afternoon tea'.	120
Live Feedback Sessions	To maximize student attendance hold feedback sessions where students submit questions after a large cumulative assignment.	120
Offer Choices in Discussion Prompts	Foster independence by giving students the option to choose what topics they would like to discuss. Students can choose from a bank of options, or come up with their own.	162
Co-design Syllabus	Use student feedback to improve your syllabus. Consider an activity where students identify a learning objective and plan, design and execute an assignment that achieves it.	172