

Podcast - September 8, 2006

More Tips for Teaching Online – Ideas for using the Discussion Board

Last week I discussed some ideas from a book I would recommend. It is Engaging the Online Learner by Conrad and Donaldson and is referenced in last week's program notes. This week I was excited about a new book I'd ordered because of the title 147 Practical Tips for Teaching Online Groups and because the foreword was by Parker J. Palmer. Unfortunately, I cannot recommend this book as I felt it in no way delivered on the title's promise.

However, I can recommend an excellent web site that does deliver. This site presents some very useful and practical tips that online instructor's will find quite interesting. I'll present just a couple of highlights and then briefly mention another web site worth reviewing.

What I particularly liked about the first site at Dallas Baptist University (<http://onlineteachingtips.com/>) is that, while the emphasis is on pedagogy, it has a very practical, in- the-trenches approach as well. For example, one issue many online instructors struggle with is providing feedback to students about their discussion board postings. In an online class of up to 32 students it is a real challenge to give individual feedback to each student – even though we know students value this feedback a great deal and it often motivates them to respond with more thoughtful discussion board comments. What to do? Here are a couple of ideas from the web site:

- on a weekly basis choose one thoughtful and well-written post by a student and repost it along with your comments about why it was well done; going one step further why not have a forum titled something like Exemplary Posts or Way To Go! and maybe provide a bonus point for anyone who's post gets into this forum?
- power to the students! This suggestion is to assign roles to two different students each week – one serves as Moderator and is responsible for keeping the forum comments on track and the second serves as a Summarizer and is responsible for summarizing the gist of that week's posts.

Grading discussion board posts can be tricky. One solution is to have published standards for what constitutes an excellent post, a good post, and so on. That's what the second web site http://online.dbu.edu/dbu/tipsandtricks/content/Discussion_Rubric.pdf offers. Bill Pelz at Herkimer County Community college presents criteria for determining the quality of a post.