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Students' Perceptions of 'Criticism' & 'Critique':
The 'Yeah But' of encouraging collaborative reflection in an online discussion forum.



Lynn Clouder – ECPE, Portugal 2004


Educational Context

- WebCT University
- Year 2 students complete 15 weeks of practice in three separate placements often at a distance from University and one another
- Discussion forum facility allows dialogue with peers while on placement
- 2 forums set up for existing seminar groups (N=22 approx)
- Each group has a critical incident & a social forum
- Forums are private
- Facilitated by a tutor

Aspirations for the Critical Incident Forums




- Sustain the community of learners in a different mode
- Broaden & deepen thinking about experiences in practice through critical reflection.
- Encourage personal knowledge construction
- Provide a framework for questioning & challenging thinking of one another & therefore learning to reflect on different levels



Research Context



Research Focus:

- The nature of online dialogue
- How it can be facilitated
- Whether or not online dialogue enhances skills of critical reflection

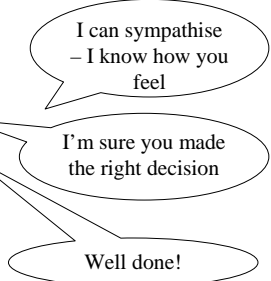

Nature of Data Analysed

- Messages posted to the forums to form discussion threads
- Written feedback at completion of 15 weeks
- Group debrief sessions
- Two cohorts studied & ideas fed back into the cycle continually

What have I learned so far?

Validation of ideas, support & empathy by other students is a means of building confidence in decision-making & knowledge of how to perform in practice

What have I learned so far?

- BUT.....
Students are reticent about critiquing ideas of their peers in case it is received as 'criticism' so limiting development of critical thinking

Yeah but... It's difficult to challenge people ...you don't know how they feel. The danger is they might feel even worse. It's too personal and we haven't got the knowledge to ask sensible questions

Success on one level but not another



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Ways of moving forward

- Emphasise the difference between unconditional support & intellectual empathy (Paul & Elder 2001)
- Differentiate between 'criticism' and 'critical reflection' through dialogue
- Lecturers & clinical educators need to aim to create an atmosphere of trust, inclusiveness & questioning (Buber, 1966)



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A Final Thought.....

- Dialogue can never be thought of as a method by which to convey knowledge, or as a technique to elicit 'right' answers, but rather, it is a critical, creative process in which understanding of reality and reality itself is tested and remade amongst others (Freire & Shor, 1987)



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References

Buber, M. (1966) *The Knowledge of Man*. New York, Harper & Row.
Freire, P. & Shor, I. (1987) *A Pedagogy for Liberation*. London, Macmillan.
Paul, R. & Elder, L. (2001) *Critical thinking: Tools for taking charge of your learning and your life*. New Jersey, Prentice Hall.



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