



Using Interteaching In a Fully Asynchronous Online Honors Seminar Course

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Using Interteaching In a Fully Asynchronous Online Honors Seminar Course

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This paper describes the modification of the Interteaching approach to simulate a seminar course in the asynchronous online course format. Each unit began with students answering a set of questions about a reading. Next, students had an interteaching discussion by reading and provided a brief comment on their classmate's answers to each question. After this discussion, students completed a record sheet summarizing their reaction to the discussion and providing the course instructor with any remaining questions about the article content. Each unit ended with the course instructor providing students with a recorded wrap up video that discussed their unanswered questions and additional relevant information. Student reaction to this format and suggestions for faculty who might be interested in using this approach are also discussed.

Introduction

Interteaching is an instructional alternative to the traditional lecture that is based on the foundational principle that the most effective way to learn something is to teach it. The defining feature of this teaching method is the “Interteach,” which is a mutually probing and informing conversation between two people. Because of the reliance on these conversations, Interteaching has the key features of being more collaborative than evaluative and more cooperative than competitive (Boyce & Hinline, 2002). A growing body of literature supports the superiority of Interteaching over traditional lecture on student understanding and retention of course material (Querol et al., 2015).

Interteaching consists of six components that occur in a sequence across each unit of course material. (1) Prior to class, students answer a set of questions about a reading from a *Preparation Guide* created by the course instructor. (2) An *Interteaching Discussion* occurs in-class during which students talk out their answers to each of the questions on the preparation guide. The course instructor moves between groups of two to six students to provide support, answer questions, and prompt conversation. (3) Immediately following the Interteaching Discussion, students complete a *Record Sheet* that contains a variety of questions

including a rating of the quality of the discussion and topics that were difficult or unclear. (4) A *Clarifying Lecture* that is no more than 15 minutes in length and that covers only the topics requested by the students in the record sheets, is presented at the beginning of the next class meeting. (5) At least five *Probes* of course content based upon the questions on the Preparation Guides should be given to students throughout the semester to assess understanding and retention of course material. (6) Students can also be given the opportunity to earn *Quality Points* on class Probes if both they and their Interteaching Discussion groupmate(s) score above a predetermined threshold (typically 80% or higher) (Boyce & Hinline, 2002).

Only two articles have been published to date on Interteaching in the fully asynchronous online classroom. In their first study on this topic, Gayman et al. (2018) adapted the Interteaching approach to a fully asynchronous undergraduate Psychology of Learning course. A within-subjects design was used in which participants alternated between the standard lecture and Interteaching in a weekly counterbalanced design. In the Interteaching sessions, students completed a preparation guide, small groups of students participated in Interteaching discussions using an asynchronous discussion forum, and students completed a record sheet after each discussion. A recorded clarifying lecture was presented to students, and students received points for viewing the clarifying lecture. As an assessment of effectiveness, test performance from the Interteaching and standard lecture weeks and cumulative final exam scores were compared. Higher test scores were found during the Interteaching weeks and on final exam material covered using Interteaching compared to the material covered during the standard recorded lecture format (Gayman et al., 2018).

In a follow-up study, Gaymen et al. (2020) wanted to determine the relative importance of the Preparation Guides and the Interteaching discussions in an asynchronous online course. In this study, final exam scores between students in an Interteaching asynchronous online course with a Preparation Guide, the standard video lecture asynchronous online course, and the standard video lecture asynchronous online course with a Preparation Guide were compared. It was found that students performed better on final exam questions that had been taught using Interteaching with a Preparation guide in comparison to the other two methods. These results support the importance of the Interteaching discussions in the learning and retention of course material.

The purpose of this article is to describe and provide evidence for the value of Interteaching in an asynchronous online undergraduate seminar course. To

this end, the adaptation of Interteaching to an asynchronous online seminar course will be described, then evidence for the efficacy of this approach and best practices and considerations will be outlined.

Interteaching in a Seminar Course

Our university has a rich array of asynchronous online course and degree offerings, and it was recently decided to offer an asynchronous online Honors Certificate to complement our distance education curriculum. The first author was recruited to create a course for this certificate (HON 301/Self and Community), and the second author served as the Instructional Designer for the course. The course instructor was asked to maximize both student-to-student and student-to-instructor interactions in this course, as this is a common feature of the face-to-face Honors Program courses. The course instructor also wanted to have students engage with material at the higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. As you will see below, student comments indicated that they understood, applied, and analyzed course readings through discussions with their peers. Thus, Interteaching proved to be a very effective methodology for achieving these teaching challenges in the asynchronous online environment.

Preparation Guide

Students began each unit by reading two articles. They were assigned five carefully crafted questions on the main points of each article, for a total of ten questions per unit. A discussion forum was created for each article, and each question was presented as a separate thread in the discussion forum. To promote careful reading and thoughtful answers, students were not able to see their groupmate's answers to the questions until they posted their answers. Except for week one, students had access to the articles on Fridays, and their answers to the questions were due on Tuesdays.

Interteaching Discussion

Once a student could view all other student answers, they were asked to write a brief one-sentence comment on each student's answer to each of the ten questions (e.g., I like how you incorporated your own experiences with X into your answer. I completely missed the discussion of X. I'm glad you pointed it out in your answer.) This structure was designed to provide a way for students to demonstrate that they read each of their groupmate's answers to each question without undue hardship. These comments were due on Thursdays.

Record Sheet

A Record Sheet was due each Friday. The record sheet questions can be found in Table 1.

Clarifying Lecture

A Clarifying Lecture was created each week based on the Record Sheet answers. Clarifying Lectures consisted of an article or website and projected on the computer screen with a video of the course instructor in the bottom corner. This format allowed the students to see both the content described and the face of the instructor in these videos. In these lectures, the course instructor summarized the answers to each of the record sheet questions. She found it most useful to present questions two and four graphically, and she often referred by name to students who had made an especially significant contribution to the discussion.

Course Assessments

In keeping with the tradition of Honors courses at our university, there were no formal exams in this course. Students were assessed based upon their participation in the Interteaching discussions, and on a creative project and research paper.

Student Comments

Because there were no course exams, the effectiveness of this teaching method was evaluated by student comments on the Record Sheets. Below is a selection of these remarks delineated by topic.

Students Preferred Opinion-Based Questions

- “In Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, the questions seemed more *opinion-based* than the The Need to Belong questions, which I really liked because they helped us connect the article to our own experiences and real-world situations.”
- “I prefer questions where we can answer freely based on our *opinions and thinking.*”

Students Enjoyed the Perspective of Other Students

- “I thought it was really interesting to see what *everyone thought* about the developmental outcomes and if there were changes that needed to be made to them.”

- “I think it would have been neat to talk about transcendence needs. I would have liked to see what *everyone’s thoughts and perspectives* on that level of needs and how it pertains to them.”

Questions Were Difficult if the Reading was Unclear

- “I initially had *difficulty understanding* the difference between promotion and prevention. I understood how they were similar, but I had a hard time putting into words how they differed. The Interteaching comments helped to clear up my confusion though.”
- “Explain how Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) have potential place-leveling effects. This question was difficult to answer in my opinion because *the explanation in the article was unclear.*”

Students Enjoyed the Clarifying Lectures

- “*I enjoy the weekly wrap up videos.* They make me feel connected to Dr. Wilson, especially when she mentions student’s names. I was called out for a good idea once, and it made me feel special and even a little smart. :)”
- “I do not have anything to add, but I do *enjoy your wrap up videos.* It is the only interaction we get, and I appreciate hearing what other classmates have to say. So, you could honestly talk about your cat for an hour, and I would be more than happy to listen.”

Best Practices for Online Asynchronous Interteaching Seminars

Based upon our experience teaching an asynchronous online Interteaching seminar course, we suggest the following best practices for others who might want to try this approach.

- Readings must be interesting and digestible for the level of student in the course.
- Give a rationale for including an especially challenging reading.
- It will take students longer than anticipated to answer and discuss the questions, so use fewer questions than you think you should use.
- It will be impossible to write questions that cover every single bit of information in an article. Directing students to specific sections and pages of an article in the Preparation Guide questions will help students hone-in on relevant parts of the article.

- As noted in the student comments, opinion questions really help discussion and students like them!
- To keep the Clarifying Lectures as short as possible and put questions with rating scales into graphs for easy overview.

Some Final Considerations

- While most students will enjoy Interteaching in an asynchronous online seminar course, you may also get some pushback. This pushback will likely stem from the course either seeming like an overwhelming amount of work for the student or an unfamiliar course format. Reassure students that the course is not meant to be overly onerous or confusing, but also realize that not all students will take to this teaching approach.
- Students may need course instructors to help them put a reasonable amount of time into the course. (We had two students say they spent 13-15 hours reading the articles and answering questions during the first unit of material. This is excessive.)
 - Provide students with a structure for how to approach the articles and questions (E.g., review the questions, read the articles with the questions in mind, then re-read the article to answer the questions).
 - Remind students that they can have the article available to them while they are answering the questions.
- There were some complaints in the Record Sheets about classmates who did not seem to be putting in the appropriate amount of effort in answering the article questions. To address this problem, points can be deducted from answer grades per a rubric and/or complaints about student effort can be mentioned in the Clarifying Lecture being sure to keep all student identities confidential.
- Occasionally, a student provided an incorrect answer to a question. In a face-to-face seminar course, this type of confusion would likely be addressed in the conversation about the article with no points deducted. However, points should probably be deducted in this setting to promote careful reading and an effective Interteaching discussion.
- Just like in any seminar course, scaling up will pose challenges. There were eight students in this course, which made for a reasonable instructor workload. This format will become extremely challenging in a class larger than twenty students.

Conclusions

This article describes the adaptation of the Interteaching method to an asynchronous online seminar course. Specifically, after completing a preparation guide on each selected reading, Interteaching discussions between students took place in a modified online discussion forum. Students then completed a record sheet on this discussion, and they were presented a brief clarifying video lecture based upon their answers to the weekly record sheets. Student comments indicated that they enjoyed this course structure, and that they especially enjoyed hearing the opinions of their classmates on the topics of the reading. Suggestions for the successful use of this teaching approach include selecting readings that are easily digestible for the level of student in the course, keeping the number of record sheet questions to a minimum, and personalizing the clarifying lectures, when appropriate.

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Table 1. Record Sheet Questions

1. How long did it take you to complete the assignments for this week?
 2. How helpful were the article questions in helping you understand the main points of the articles this week?
 3. (Answer Choices: Not At All Helpful, Slightly Helpful, Somewhat Helpful, Very Helpful, Extremely Helpful)
 4. How would you rate the quality of the Interteaching Discussion this week?
 5. (Answer Choices: Poor, Below Average, Average, Above Average, Excellent)
 6. Were any of the article questions unclear or difficult to answer in some way?
 7. Name one interesting thing that you learned in the discussion with your classmates this week.
 8. Was there any information that was not covered in the article questions that you would have liked to have discussed?
 9. What are questions or topics you would like Dr. Wilson to address in her video review for this week?
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