

THREE STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING AUTONOMY AND DECREASING ISOLATION ONLINE

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Effective communication has been found to be one of the key elements of a successful distance learning course (Berge, 1999; Higgins et al., 2001; Young, 2006), and the lack of such communication can lead to isolation, frustration, and higher dropout rates (Berge 1999; Hara & Kling 2000; Northrup, 2002). Yet, one of the features of distance learning that receives continuous criticism is its inability to provide a student-instructor dialogue that is comparable to that of an FTF classroom (Kirkup & Jones, 1996). The ambiguity of student-instructor dialogue and delayed teacher responses caused by the asynchronous environment is also thought to lead to increased student dissatisfaction (Hara & Kling, 2000). Because of the lack of natural conversations in the web-based DL classroom, online teachers need to implement strategies that encourage student-instructor dialogue (Hansson & Wenno, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Nevertheless, the presence of dialogue itself does not guarantee its effectiveness (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004). In other words, more is not necessarily better online, as the amount of exchange in a DL web-based course can be overwhelming and can eventually become a huge burden for both students and online professors. In a technology-mediated, often asynchronous environment, there is a definite shift from academic to affective support that instructors have to provide for their learners (White 2005; La Ganza, 2001), but many teachers still do not know how to transfer their instructional talents into the online environment. Consequently, colleges and instructors often set up student-instructor dialogue in a way that is familiar to them, but that is not necessarily structured according to the needs and aspirations of the students.

This presentation will present three main strategies that help boost learner autonomy and decrease isolation online. They include: the shift of the teacher's role, the creation of the interrelational climate and the development of the 3 aspects of student-instructor dialogue. The goal of this presentation is to provide hands-on strategies for creating effective student-instructor dialogue that increases connection, boosts autonomy and minimizes isolation online.

By the end of the presentation the participants will be able to:

1. Discover three dimensions of "dialogue" revealed in my doctorate study which was based on Transactional Distance Theory by Moore (1993) and the Dynamic Interrelational Space Model by La Ganza (2004).
2. Understand 4 types of interrelational dynamics (La Ganza, 2004) that exist online and recognize the most effective climate for fostering student autonomy.
3. Realize the dynamic nature of student-instructor dialogue
4. Learn practical strategies on how to increase connection and boost learner autonomy through student-instructor dialogue.
5. Develop tools that help technology "disappear" in an online classroom.

Short:

The goal of this presentation is to demonstrate three dimensions of student-instructor dialogue essential for a DL course that involve communication, interrelation and a transcendence of cyberspace. It will also provide hands-on strategies for creating effective student-instructor dialogue that increases connection, boosts autonomy and minimizes isolation online.

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