

## Preface

Online learning is ubiquitous in higher education. The number of students taking online courses offered by higher education institutions continues to increase. The increase in enrollment is largely driven by the demand for easy access to engaging course materials and web resources that address diverse learner needs especially among nontraditional students. While enrollment in online education continues to expand, concerns regarding rigor and comparability to traditional course outcomes persist. Unlike in traditional learning environments, the concepts of interaction, presence, and participation in the online courses can be challenging.

In order to ensure effective and significant outcomes, attention needs to be paid to the levels of interaction, presence, and participation in online courses as proposed by the two distance education learning theories of Transactional Distance (Moore, 1993) and Community of Inquiry (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000). According to the Moore's theory of Transactional Distance, the three levels of interaction key to effective teaching and learning in online environments are learner-instructor, learner-learner, and learner-content interaction. The Community of Inquiry theoretical framework on the other hand establishes the need for presence, which has been described as the degree to which one feels connected to the learning community. The three types of presence deemed essential to learning are namely social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence. In essence the two theories of distance education postulate the need for considerations of the existence of elements of structure, dialogue, self-directedness, a sense of membership, collaboration, meaning-making, and instructor immediacy in the design, implementation, and delivery of online courses.

Researchers have suggested the need for continued inquiry into best practices, strategies, and approaches that help address the challenges of ensuring interaction, presence, and participation in online education to meet students' diverse learning needs. The objective of this book is to provide educators with access to information regarding theoretical foundations, empirical or research-based tips, practical pedagogical strategies, and appropriate technological tools for encouraging, individually and in combination, the important elements of interaction and presence in online courses to ensure student learning, satisfaction, and participation in online courses. In addition, this book is intended for course designers who help develop and design online courses. Finally, the proposed publication is meant for researchers with an agenda in examining interaction, presence, and participation in online courses. More broadly, the publication contributes significantly to the literature on course development and delivery techniques that help improve instruction, learning, and satisfaction in online courses. From the research presented through this scholarly endeavor, course designers, instructors, and researchers will gain a deeper understanding of how elements of interaction and presence ensure optimal participation and quality online learning experiences.

## **ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK**

This book is comprised of 20 chapters that are organized into two main sections: *Theoretical Applications and Research Basis for Interaction, Presence, and Participation in Online Courses* and *Practical Applications and Strategies for Ensuring Interaction, Presence, and Participation in Online Courses*. Each chapter is authored or co-authored by a best practice educator in higher education settings and discusses research-based evidence strategies for successful participation, interaction, problem-solving and developing presence in online learning environments.

A brief description of each of the chapters follows:

In Chapter 1, the literature on the ecological model and its application to student interaction in online learning environments is discussed. The author focuses on the importance of considering the interface in the design and delivery of online courses as the interface is important in the mediation of the three levels of interaction: learner-learner, learner-instructor and learner-content interactions. The macro and microsystems or environments in which online learning occurs are presented.

Chapter 2 first provides an overview of the major motivation theories, and then follows up with an examination of the research on the application of motivational theory and the ARCS-V model to instructional design. Special attention is given to discussing course design and instructional strategies for tackling issues of academic performance and attrition in online environments.

In Chapter 3, the important role faculty play in the design and delivery of instruction in online learning environment and the effect on student engagement and retention is presented. In this chapter, emphasis is placed on how faculty participation and visibility in the online course is central to students' motivation to "stick" with learning online. The author of this chapter echoes the need for on-going faculty professional development and support as suggested in past research.

Chapter 4 switches from a focus on the online instructor to a focus on the online student and participation in online environments. In this chapter, the author explores the meanings, definitions, and attributions associated with student participation in online courses. The author also offers a viewpoint on how students' individual learning styles influence participation.

Chapter 5 discusses past literature on the use of a specific educational medium, reflective blog journals, for building critical thinking, collaboration, interaction, and engagement among students in online courses. A description of how reflective blog journals were used in a postgraduate online course to help develop professional expertise among students is presented.

Chapter 6 presents a mixed methods study on how instructors established their own social presence in an accelerated online course and the effect of this strategy on student learning. The author of this chapter cautions readers on the complexity of designing and implementing online courses with the construct of presence in mind.

In Chapter 7, the outcomes from a case study on the use of individualized structured synchronous video conference sessions in an online literacy course for graduate students are presented. The study's data included student written reflections and session transcripts. Suggestions on the usefulness of and how to design online mentoring sessions to promote presence, interaction, and engagement online are discussed.

Chapter 8 presents another case study on training educators of adult learners in online environments. In this chapter, the authors highlight the principles of adult education and its application in online learning for promoting engagement, active participation, interaction, and immediacy among educators and learners.

Chapter 9 presents solutions to the challenges faculty face in synchronous online learning environments. In this chapter, readers are exposed to findings from a case study on the design and development of a self-paced orientation to develop student readiness. The results of the case study demonstrate how this orientation positively prepared students to be ready for learning in a synchronous online environment.

Chapter 10 discusses the findings from a study on online economics courses. The objectives of the study were twofold: To investigate faculty choice of web-based technologies for implementing the three major types of online interaction in the courses and to examine student perception and recommendations regarding such technologies. The results from this investigation suggest that discussion boards are most effective for promoting all three types of interaction in online learning environments.

Chapter 11 highlights a number of best practices and time management strategies for promoting interaction and presence online to maximize student success and satisfaction. The strategies shared in the chapter are helpful for creating an efficient online classroom while managing teaching time effectively to ensure interaction, presence and participation.

In Chapter 12, the authors provide a list of practical strategies and techniques that can be applied to enhance interaction and social presence within the online learning environments. Specifically, the authors focus on how this can be done while using social media and other collaborative technological tools applicable in online learning.

Chapter 13 discusses different tips and strategies necessary for enhancing student engagement in online environments. The authors point out the importance of having instructors design and deliver courses that engage their students in the cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains of online learning by promoting all the three levels of interaction of learner-content, learner-instructor, and learner-learner interactions. In the process, the authors propose the application of flow theory in the design and implementation of online courses.

Chapter 14 focuses on the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework and describes the construct of presence. Strategies for ensuring presence through course design to promote learners' critical reflection and engagement are presented. Also presented are techniques for establishing presence from the perspective of the course instructors, facilitators, and course participants.

In Chapter 15, the authors explore pedagogical techniques needed to design and teach courses effectively in online learning environments. The authors emphasize the importance of interaction and immediacy in online learning and the share applications and strategies that ensure successful development and implementation of effective online courses.

In Chapter 16, the authors remind readers that effective online instruction requires an understanding of not only interaction but also of how to facilitate interaction through the use or application of technology in the online course. The authors of this chapter examine the different types of interaction and suggest ways faculty could work on incorporating each of these types of interaction in their online courses.

Chapter 17 offers different strategies for encouraging and maximizing student engagement and participation for both novice and experienced instructors who are beginning their teaching careers online. In this chapter, the author describes the challenges faculty might face in their quest to teach online for the first time and offers best practices for discouraging procrastination, setting clear expectations, encouraging individuality, capitalizing on diversity, and providing and utilizing helpful resources for online students.

Chapter 18 presents a number of vignettes that demonstrate how to design, position, and implement effective online courses aligned with both Bloom's Taxonomy and the Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, Redefinition (SAMR) model. The purpose of this chapter is to provide direction for de-

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veloping the task for social presence, cognitive presence and a collaborative stance in authentic online learning environments.

In Chapter 19, the authors address the dearth of research on establishing the importance of teaching presence for the integration of multicultural online education with specific focus on English language learners. The study highlights the role of teaching presence in multicultural and online education, the merits and demerits of English language learners in online learning, and best practices for teaching multicultural education online.

Chapter 20 provides readers with information on pedagogical approaches, strategies, and tools for teaching film style to students in a way that encourages and ensures interaction, presence, and participation in an asynchronous online setting. The author draws from the experience of twenty years of traditional course teaching and from five years of teaching online. The chapter openly confronts questions of instructional quality, academic rigor, assessment, interaction, and the parity of teaching online as against teaching face-to-face.

In general, the chapters presented in this book highlight the importance of designing and delivering interactive and engaging online courses while holding important the concepts of interaction and presence. As previously stated, having present the elements of interaction and presence encourages participation and significant learning in online environments. Again, the chapters highlight advances in instructional design practices, the role of faculty, faculty training and development, and appropriate technological tools and resources essential for the design and delivery of effective courses in online learning environments.

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