Chapter 16
Technology Meets Affect: Scaffolding Students’ Socio–Emotional Needs Through Virtual Learning

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ABSTRACT
This chapter describes a variety of multimedia incorporated into a course to respond to students’ emotional and psychological needs. The course was designed for online, hybrid, as well as traditional face-to-face formats. The multimedia incorporated into the course were tools readily available for collegiate use (e.g., email, Google Drive, Wikispace). This research, based on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, asserts that many of the experiences and technological devices integrated into twenty-first century instruction, respond to critical emotional elements of learning. While technological advancements provide convenience, the authors argue that the learner’s affective needs are equally supported. Instructors, irrespective of their level of technological proficiency or their access to digital devices, may use these insights to incorporate technology for instruction in more thoughtful ways.

INTRODUCTION
Technology offers demonstrable enhancement to learning. Mindful of their benefits, instructors continue to incorporate technological tools into their courses. Many colleges and universities have specific policies that mandate the inclusion of ever increasing technologies into the curriculum. Online courses draw students because of ease of accessibility and convenience. Long treks through local traffic or across international borders are avoided by on-line enrolment. Group meetings using “virtual spaces” can occur simultaneously in the privacy of one’s home or other public spaces with Internet access (e.g., a pub or coffee shop) throughout the world.

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Asynchronous instruction, permitting flexible scheduling (i.e., “log on anytime convenient for you”) is often a significant inducement. Finally, for those who eschew large crowds or mega-auditoriums, online learning provides a greater sense of intimacy. While effusive engagement with others may bring about novel ideas, periods of solitary introspection are equally important for academic advancement. Library searches that formerly necessitated knowledge of the Library of Congress cataloguing system, and a variety of ancillary tools (e.g., available photocopy machine, a stapler) can be accomplished or expanded to include even broader searches, store, make copies, and share articles in a significantly shorter amount of time.

Like any tool, digital and other media yield better results when there is a clear strategy or rationale for their use. In far too many cases, instructors are digital immigrants, Luddites, or worse, ‘technophobes’ who find themselves responsible for the instruction of “digital natives.” Younger students arrive with increasingly higher expectations (and experience) around technology. Instructors, while they may include technology to varying degrees, albeit begrudgingly, seldom understand the full extent to which such tools enhance the learning experience or address critical factors of instruction.

Students and faculty often lament the lack of face-to-face interactions. They complain about not being able to receive (or provide) immediate feedback and clarifications. Office hours or consultations appear to be nothing more than an illusion. Feedback, in the minds of these protestors, is delayed. For them, cyberspace is an insurmountable barrier − they feel clueless and hopelessly overwhelmed about collaborations. Because they are frequently required to be engaged in acts of learning away from the class, they anticipate an absence of common learning experiences and referents (Thibaut, 2015). Alone in (cyber) space, the only voice students anticipate hearing is their own.

This chapter identifies the social-emotional or affective needs of the learner that can be addressed through the various digital or technology-based media. Using an established framework, Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, we detail the use of various media and their contributions to the students’ academic achievement.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to appreciate the multiple processes that are simultaneously engaged during the act of learning-teaching, several theories must be combined. They create a theoretical framework that addresses: (1) the cognitive goals (i.e., what should be taught); (2) the socio-emotional factors that mediate learning, and; (3) the pedagogical strategies that will be used to clarify the ideas, inform, guide and (hopefully) engage the learner. A review of the literature on learning-teaching indicates that more humanistic approaches are extremely effective with a greater variety of learners. In this context, humanistic refers to instructional practices that purposefully incorporate modes of engagement that support psychological needs and desires.

Based on the extant research, the authors propose that the most advocated approaches for effective instruction intrinsically include an awareness of this psychology. They include Constructivism (Bandura, 1975; 1995), Community of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978). Underlying all these humanistic pedagogical approaches is the inherent belief that learning can be enhanced or inhibited to the degree that instruction responds to basic human needs (see Figure 1).

In the following section, we expatiate on Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. Subsequently, we briefly discuss the modes and methods developed to address the humanistic learning theories and Maslow’s taxonomy.