Online Instructional Communication

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Edited by

Stephanie Kelly

Cambridge
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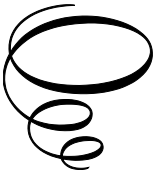

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FOREWORD

STEPHANIE KELLY

Like my mentors before me, I have long believed that technology-mediated communication (and hence online learning) can be just as effective as face-to-face communication if message senders have effectively adapted their messages to the channel and used supporting technologies efficiently. I recently (at least "recently" as of the time this book was published) served as co-editor for a special topic of *Frontiers in Communication* on classroom culture and the COVID-19 pandemic. It encouraged me to see that many scholars, whether they had been open to the idea of online education before the pandemic or not, had embraced the idea that online learning had benefits, so much so that they questioned whether aspects of pandemic pedagogy should ever go away (c.f., Claus et al. 2021).

When this book was proposed in 2019, I certainly never dreamed that we would soon be living through a pandemic that would force most educators and students into the world of online learning. My early assumption about the book was that it would be written for audiences who were open to online teaching of their own accord and looking for ways to improve their practices. When the world moved online, the book quickly evolved into something different.

Indeed, the purpose of this book quickly shifted to serve a wider range of audiences:

1. Those who have been recently forced into teaching online and are looking for quick how-to guidance in facilitating online classrooms to make the experience better for all involved
2. Those who have embraced online teaching and are looking for ways to think more deeply about how optimize their instructional communication practices

As such, this book is divided into two sections. The first section provides practical guidance such as how to set up discussion boards to foster true engagement, creating videos, facilitating discussion of sensitive subjects,

managing communication apprehension, and controlling cheating in online courses. The second section takes a deep dive into instructional theory, challenging online educators to think beyond the checklist of what they're doing and instead think about how they are doing it, with chapters that focus on the roles of humor, ignorance, student dissent behaviors, and instructor misbehaviors.

Before the pandemic, there was an abundance of research on the most effective delivery of online instruction. Yet, the tone of much of this work was what to do if we must make do with online learning rather than the superior channel of face-to-face. My sincere hope is that we are emerging into a new era of connectivity in which we are no longer viewing online education as the second-best choice, but rather embracing knowledge such as that which is shared in these chapters, and reframing online education as an equally effective, but different mode of teaching and learning. Happy reading!

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Claus, C. J., Girardelli, D., Kelly, S., & Permyakova, T. M. (2021). Editorial: Cultural changes in instructional practices due to Covid-19. *Frontiers in Communication*, https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2021.715180

SECTION 1:

HOW-TO NUTS AND BOLTS OF ONLINE INSTRUCTIONAL COMMUNICATION

CHAPTER 1

THREE PRESENCE LESSONS FOR ALL STUDENTS

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At my institution, I am located in a business college where I teach a computer-mediated communication course that serves as a sophomore-level elective for business information technology majors. For most of my students, this is the only pure communication class they take. Though many take a business communication course, it focuses heavily on the formatting and form-style writing of business documents. As such, this computer-mediated communication course is the one opportunity most of these students have to think about how communication concepts and theories could apply to a wide variety of real-life contexts. Often, once my students leave that computer-mediated communication course, I never have them in class again. That means I rarely get to hear whether they found the skills they learned to be useful or saw the application of the material.

Then COVID-19 happened, and all of their classes went online. For the first time, my students were thrust into a world in which most of their classroom-related communication was mediated by technology, whether they wanted it to be or not. To my surprise, I started hearing back from my students about how they were applying course material to their virtual learning experience and how they saw it make a difference. Three particular lessons were referenced multiple times:

1. Augmented Gaze
2. Community of Inquiry Social Presence Cues
3. Propinquity in Group Work

The purpose of this chapter is to overview each of these concepts and their relevance to teaching online.

Social Presence

Before we dive into the details of those three concepts, we need to establish an understanding of social presence because each of the three lessons involved utilizing social presence cues. Social presence is the sense of non-mediation (Lombard & Ditton, 1997). For example, to an online student, the more social presence there is in a class, the more the online class feels like a face-to-face class. Social presence is a psychological connection that can be built from the teacher to students, amongst individual students, and between the students and content (Garrison et al., 2010).

Social presence has numerous benefits for online learning. Students who perceive high social presence in their online courses are going to be more satisfied with the course (Richardon & Swan, 2003), have more motivation to engage with course material (Kelly & Westerman, 2016), and have higher cognitive learning (Mackey & Freyberg, 2013). In short, online classes that develop high social presence do not just have students that learn more, they have students who want to learn more.

There are numerous ways that faculty (and knowledgeable students) can develop social presence in their classrooms. For instructors, addressing students by name, taking the time to sign electronic messages, and responding to emails quickly each lead to higher social presence (c.f., Kelly & Fall, 2011; Kelly & Westerman, 2016). Skillful use of emojis, specifically the smiling and winking emojis, are also helpful in developing social presence (Vareberg & Westerman, 2020).

The rest of this chapter will cover additional cues for developing social presence. These three communication tools represent the social presence cues that my students reported to be most noteworthy in their COVID-19 learning experience. It is perhaps that students found these cues to be noteworthy because they were the most impactful of their practiced social presence cues. However, these particular social presence cues are not as intuitive to integrate into mediated communication as many other communicative behaviors. So, it is also possible that they stood out to students because skillful use of these cues was rare in their classroom, and as such, their intentional practice of these cues made them stand out among their peers as polished communicators.

Augmented Gaze

Bailenson et al. (2005) coined the phrase “augmented gaze” to explain the illusion that someone is giving individual eye contact to all audience members in video-based communication. Bailenson et al.’s (2005) original

work on augmented gaze used avatars to give the illusion of eye contact. Now though, augmented gaze can be used during video conferencing to give the appearance that the speaker is giving each audience member eye contact (Rocker et al., 2019).

Eye contact is incredibly important during any communication in cultures that use this behavior to show respect or attention (c.f., Mehrabian, 1981). Providing eye contact when communicating through a piece of technology makes the communication feel more like face-to-face communication (Kelly & Westerman, 2016). This sense of presence, or non-mediation, makes people more satisfied with the communication.

To effectively create augmented gaze, one must ensure that their camera is set up to provide adequate visibility to make eye contact. This means having sufficient lighting so that the speaker's facial expressions are easy to see, and that the camera has been set up so that it is at eye level with the speaker (Christen & Kelly, 2018). In other words, the camera should not be set up to look up someone's nose or at the top of their forehead. This will break the illusion of eye contact.

Once the camera is set up adequately, using augmented gaze effectively takes discipline to look into the camera rather than at the screen. This feels unnatural at first as we attempt to notice the nonverbal behaviors of other people on the screen, which must be done with peripheral vision to effectively use augmented gaze. However, looking directly into the camera is essential to give the illusion of eye contact.

Why Augmented Gaze?

Students who took this lesson to heart set up their learning space so that when the logged onto their online courses, they could use augmented gaze while giving presentations or engaging in a synchronous course discussion. They noted that their presentations received far better feedback on delivery than their peers who may have had equal quality content. They found that effectively using the technology for their communication left their audience more satisfied with their communication.

Augmented gaze is important for more than just online learning environments. Teaching students to utilize augmented gaze regularly will ensure that they make better impressions when they engage in online interviews (Rocker et al., 2019) and appear more competent when they engage in virtual meetings through teleconferencing (Christen et al., 2019). As such, this is an important skill for all burgeoning professionals to practice.

Community of Inquiry Social Presence Cues

The community of inquiry model of presence outlines a number of behaviors that enhance a variety of types of presence: teacher presence, cognitive presence, and social presence (Garrison et al., 2000). Although the entire model is useful, for the purpose of this chapter we will only talk about social presence. According to this model, there are three communicative behaviors that individuals can engage in that increase social presence in an online learning environment:

1. Affective: the sharing of feelings, thoughts, or opinions
2. Cohesive: the use of inclusive language such as *we, our*, or *us*
3. Interactive: inviting further communication

Let's look at an example of how these behaviors might manifest in a short, beginning of the week email to online learners:

Good morning, Students!

*This week **we** are covering Chapter 8 of **our** textbook, which focuses on ignorance and communication. **To me, this is the most interesting chapter of the entire book because it challenges us to think deeply about our personal communication assumptions**. The assignment accompanying this chapter is in the Week 8 folder. **Let me know if you have any questions!***

Best,

Dr. Kelly

Notice the bold text. First, we see examples of cohesive communication in which the instructor refers to the class as "our" class and states what "we" are going to do this week. Then, in the second sentence, the instructor gives their opinion about this chapter, which is an example of affective communication. Finally, the last sentence of the email invites students to contact the professor if they have questions. This is an example of interactive communication.

Why the Community of Inquire behaviors?

When COVID-19 moved students into the online classroom, many found themselves working on a lot of discussion boards. Some of them emulated the community of inquiry (Garrison et al., 2000) discussion board model we had practiced in their computer-mediated communication course in their now online courses. This meant that when they replied to peers'

posts, they did not just leave a comment to comment like, "good point." At a minimum, they took time to briefly share their thoughts about the post and invite further communication (typically by asking a follow-up question). The outcome of this was that there were actual discussions on the discussion boards these students became involved with. As a result, not only were these students receiving perfect scores on the discussion board assignments, but their professors were also sending them notes of thanks and bestowing accolades on them such as "class leader."

These online communication cues are beneficial when used by more than just students. When faculty use these same community of inquiry social presence cues (Garrison et al., 2000), students are more likely to be engaged in the material and feel comfortable asking faculty questions when they need help (Christen et al., 2015). These cues can be useful outside of the classroom as well. Utilizing these social presence cues in workplace emails makes supervisors seem more approachable, likewise making subordinates more likely to ask for clarity when they are confused (Kelly & Autman, 2015).

Propinquity in Group Work

The theory of electronic propinquity was proposed by Korzenny in 1978. Korzenny recognized that when communicating with someone through technology, misunderstandings were more prone to happen as cues were lost. For example, when communicating with someone on the telephone in the 1970's misunderstandings were more likely to happen because message receivers were not able to receive the visual cues that accompanied senders' messages, such as facial expressions and hand gestures. Korzenny (1978) realized that over time, misunderstandings minimized when individuals continuously used the same method of mediated communication because they began to adapt to the limited richness of the medium and how other communicators compensated for the lack of visual cues in the channel. He called this ability to convey a consistent voice through a channel that does not allow you to display your full personality the level of *propinquity* in the interaction.

The theory of electronic propinquity indicates that the key to becoming propinquitous when communicating through technology is to make a conscious decision to communicate with someone through only one channel until you can do so with no misunderstandings. Only once you have mastered communicating in that channel should you spread to other channels. As Goke and Kelly (2019) summarize, communicating through multiple mediated channels early in a working relationship hinders individuals' ability to

understand each other because the variance of cues one can use in different channels (e.g., text, email, discussion boards) makes it difficult to establish a recognizable voice.

Why Propinquity in Group Work?

I am certain that I am not the only educator who has noticed that no matter what online workspace I build for my students, they will prefer to communicate with one another for group work through a group texting service such as GroupMe. After we study the theory of electronic propinquity in the computer-mediated communication course, students are challenged to communicate in group work ONLY through the channels built within Blackboard and then reflect upon the difference in their experience doing group work with only one channel vs. prior group work where they could communicate through any channel they chose. Although students are not a fan of using the learning management system, they consistently report that communicating through only that system has multiple benefits:

1. There are fewer miscommunications as the group gets to know one another, especially given that most students will take time to write in full sentences on the learning management system knowing that the professor can see their correspondence.
2. They do not waste time as the project moves forward trying to find the previous channel in which an important message or document was shared by a group member.
3. Conversations flow continuously rather that restarting when channels are switched.

In short, students who insisted that their online groups use one channel for communication, whether it be email, the learning management system, or another medium, reported that their group experiences were much more amenable than their peers' experiences seemed to be. This heightened efficiency in group work using propinquity spans contexts (Goke & Kelly, 2019), so using it in school now is good practice for the workplace later.

Conclusion

In sum, each of these lessons are about building more social presence. Students, when forced to engage in a fully virtual learning environment, recognized that using these social presence tools made others perceive them to be substantively better communicators and helped them work more

efficiently. As such, I feel that lessons on these topics should be worked into any computer-mediated communication course. However, instructors of any online course should consider briefly integrating these lessons. Without a theoretical background, each of these best practices for interacting online can be easily integrated into any online course. For example:

- The steps to setting up a webcam for successfully using augmented gaze can be worked into webcam etiquette practices of the syllabus.
- The community of inquiry social presence cues can be laid out as expectations of peer responses on discussion boards in the grading rubric.
- Being propinquitous, requiring students to document their efforts through whatever communication tool is developed for them in the learning management system, can be a requirement of group assignments.

Giving students the guidance for developing social presence in their online classroom will enhance their experience in any online course while better preparing them for the workplace.

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CHAPTER 2

INCREASING STUDENT INTERACTION: THE ONLINE PEDAGOGICAL ADVANTAGE

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Among the goals of higher education are increasing student interaction; as well as effective communication—verbal and written, and research and critical thinking skills (Germaine et al., 2016; Griffin et al., 2012; NEA, 2012). While Socratic and applied pedagogical methods have been used to enhance traditional classroom participation, it remains nearly impossible to allow every student in a course to communicate in each week's face-to-face classes. Regardless of the time code, or the number of days per week that a face-to-face class meets—it remains extremely difficult for courses with 15 or more students to require and assure that each of them contributes to discussion every week. As Kurthen (2014) has noted regarding face-to-face courses,

> a review of the literature confirms a long-standing consensus that class size matters for interaction quantity and quality. This is not surprising since smaller classes increase the ability of instructors and the willingness of students to engage in higher quality, positive forms of interaction. (p. 15)

Based on these findings, unless face-to-face classes are small, it is hard if not impossible to assure that every student is interacting each week during class in meaningful and goal-/outcome-focused ways.

Furthermore, Umbach and Wawryzynski (2005) found that

> students report higher levels of engagement and learning at institutions where faculty members use active and collaborative learning techniques, engage students in experiences, emphasize higher-order cognitive activities in the classroom, interact with students, challenge students academically, and value enriching educational experiences. (p. 153)

Thus, it is important to assess how an online classroom can accomplish the outcome goals of increased student interaction and collaboration while emphasizing effective communication, assimilation of material, and critical thinking. Consequently, this chapter will provide insight for fostering student engagement, particularly through discussion boards, based on 15 years of teaching experiences bolstered by online learning research.

Assessing Outcome Goals

Regardless of the audience demographics (age, grade, geographic locale, etc.) outcome goals (e.g., student interaction, written communication effectiveness, group versus individual work, critical thinking, etc.) need to be assessed in order to determine the most effective online format for a particular course. Numerous studies (Chen et al., 2005; Giesbers et al., 2013; Yamagata-Lynch, 2014; Young et al., 2014) have shown the advantages of synchronous (instructor and students online at the same time), asynchronous (instructor and students online independently), or hybrid [combined face-to-face and online (synchronous or asynchronous)] classes. For example, a relatively small, graduate course (10 or fewer students) might benefit from a face-to-face and synchronous (if traditional full-time graduate students) or asynchronous (for nontraditional, professionals seeking an advanced degree) online hybrid format depending on their time planning/commitments. However, a larger graduate course, especially if the students include nontraditional working members, would likely prefer an asynchronous, fully online pedagogical approach that allows less interference with students' work:education:life balance. And undergraduates, or pre-college students, might need a mixed synchronous and asynchronous virtual classroom—especially in crisis situations like the recent COVID-19 pandemic, in order to maintain a social environment during a time of stress/anxiety. However, evaluating the format for the class must also include not just the audience, but the content and expected deliverables.

The type of course being taught, as well as the assessment tools and learning expectations must all be part of the decision-making in regard to the format. For example, depending on the students and the level of difficulty for the material being studied a synchronous or hybrid approach may be needed not just to deliver the material, but to provide live nonverbal feedback from the students vis-à-vis the videos and/or face-to-face meetings. Conversely, less complex courses might be ideal for either mixed synchronous and asynchronous, or completely asynchronous style classes. The key is to determine how critical feedback [verbal (face-to-face) versus

written] is from both instructor and student perspectives in order to achieve both desired student interactions and learning outcomes.

Student Feedback

Based on a desire to increase student interaction, as well as assess the class's assimilation of the material, research, critical thinking, and communication skills, the next consideration is what type of student feedback [verbal (face-to-face or video), written, or both] are the most important to accomplishing the course's goals. Part of this assessment will be based on the type of web-based learning management software your institution prescribes. For example, does your course management program provide a synchronous video capability (e.g., Zoom)? If so, then you could require students to meet online in a video classroom, not unlike traditional face-to-face, brick and mortar, environments at a set time and day. However, synchronous attendance may not be possible for all students based on their schedules; this is highly probable given that many online learners opt for distance learning over face-to-face so that they have flexibility with when they engage in coursework (Kelly & Westerman, 2016). Consequently, this chapter will focus on how to maximize student interaction using written communication in an asynchronous format.

Studies have shown that in online classrooms, across disciplines, critical thinking can be assessed vis-à-vis various writing experiences (Anderson, 2006; Arend, 2007; Boyd, 2013; Leppa, 2004; Williams & Lahman, 2011). Consequently, one of the real advantages of an interactive, asynchronous classroom is providing a breadth of writing opportunities for students to demonstrate and enhance their written communication skills. In an asynchronous format for an online course (full or hybrid), the instructor can give students a protracted period of time to analyze the question(s), text, or data and use critical thinking to provide a thoughtful effectively communicated written response. Furthermore, this design provides time for not just the instructor to respond to a student's response, but also for many members of the class to participate in the ensuing interaction. Consequently, one of the main advantages of an asynchronous online class is the opportunity for a 360º assessment of the students' thinking.

In an asynchronous course, a discussion board can be used to post seminar-style questions or texts to be analyzed, research to be done, etc. Students individually have a set period of time to assess the question, assignment, and/or text and post their individual analyses for everyone in the course to read and respond to. It is critical to set deadlines because this will increase the interaction opportunities. Having multiple discussion

boards active simultaneously with different interaction deadlines will help keep students engaged in the class and manage professor's workload as facilitator of the discussion boards.

One of the decisions an instructor needs to make in facilitating discussion boards, is when to respond to students' posts each week. If the first student's response gets a detailed analysis and feedback from the instructor, then the rest of the class will not be necessarily responding to the original query, but instead to the instructor's response to the earliest posters. Or the students may feel that the instructor has covered the feedback they intended to make and therefore, not reply or limit their responses. Yet, it is critical for students to see timely responses from instructors on these posts so that they feel a sense of community and connection in the course (Garrison et al., 2010; Kelly & Westerman, 2016). Consequently, it may be more interactive for the instructor to acknowledge the student's post, but to state something like, "Thank you for starting our conversation about this important topic, let's see what your colleagues have to say." By doing so, the instructor is letting the student who posted the response know it was seen and read (immediate feedback), met the requirement, but also not taking away the opportunity for classmates to provide their own views on the topic/question without the instructor's input to influence, or minimize, their critical thinking. Once a majority of the class has responded to the instructor's question, then s/he can either respond individually to each student or provide a more global response to the class, explaining why some answers were more effective than others and elaborating on the information that s/he wants the students to learn from the query.

By using the specific names of students in a macro-level response the student feels acknowledged and the instructor builds on the interpersonal relationship s/he is trying to forge with each contributor. In fact, using students' names in each interaction is important for building presence in online courses, which results in higher student motivation for further interaction (Kelly & Westerman, 2016; Vareberg et al., 2021; Vareberg & Westerman, 2021). The use of individualized responses by name, illustrate not just that the instructor has read the student's comments, but that the feedback is personalized and not just a copy and paste response across all students' work. Furthermore, this interpersonal, individualized interaction further illustrates the similarities between teacher-student communication in face-to-face versus online learning environments.

The goal is to maximize the students' interaction by having them not only critically analyze and communicate their thinking regarding the instructor's question, but also their classmates' responses to the instructor, as well as the direct feedback received from peers and the instructor to the

student's answer. As a result, in an asynchronous online class, students can communicate their assimilation of the material, any research, as well as their thinking, but also an analysis of their peers' responses, the instructor's feedback, and their own assessment of what they learned from both the instructor and classmates' comments. This provides a 360º evaluation for students of their thinking, but also of their written communication.

Establishing Clear Expectations

As mentioned above, teachers need to critically reflect on their objectives not just for assignments in online courses, but especially on the communication and interaction that they expect from their students. They need clear guidelines on how often they should interact as well as the depth of thought required in their interactions. Detailed rubrics are useful for making these expectations clear. It is also important to have interaction expectations laid out in the syllabus. Below is a sample text setting forth expectations in a syllabus:

***Online Participation**: Your participation in class discussions is essential to your and our learnings in this course. Consequently, you are expected to participate frequently online (at least 2 different days/week). This class depends on the open exchange of ideas and information among classmates--if you choose not to respect the ideas of your colleagues, or not to discuss class topics seriously--then please withdraw from this course. Our goal is to learn from each other in this class.*

In order to assure that we acquire information and knowledge from not just the textbook or the teacher, this online course requires as much interaction and feedback from each of you as possible. Consequently, to assure that goal is reached, there are specific online interaction requirements for this class. Your Online Participation grade will be based on the following expectations:

- *You need to be online in the asynchronous Discussion Threads for each week on a minimum of 2 different days (asynchronous = anytime of any day each week, your choice)*
- *You need to answer my questions in the Discussion Threads each week, **first**, and then respond to a minimum of five of your classmates' posts/week **(five total responses per week, not per Thread)***
- *You need to post your first response to my question in 1 Thread, before 11:59 pm on Tuesday each week and your second, no later*

than 11:59 pm on Thursday each week, unless specified differently within the Threads.

- *Your comments in the Discussion Threads need to be substantive (quantity) and demonstrate your critical thinking (quality) and assimilation of the material by using terms and theories from our texts (book, journal articles, handouts, videos, and so forth). Detailed examples from your life experiences are always good ways to support your analysis/thesis.*
- *You are expected to respond in paragraphs (quantity), not sentences.*
- *Writing in your Discussion Threads will be evaluated based on your use of 3rd person removed (no "I, me, my, you, we, our," etc.) style, without contractions (no they're, won't, isn't, etc.), as well as use of APA (2020) for any quotes or citations. In addition, you are expected to meet or exceed communication standards for grammar of a college student regarding your content, editing (no typos, missing words, misspelled words, etc.), and syntax (quality of your writing).*

Based on the above criteria, you will be graded as follows:

- *Posts on 2 or more different days per week (by due dates, Tuesday, Thursday, Sunday), that meet the qualitative and quantitative standards above, to the professor's questions and at least five classmates' responses = 90 – 100% of points possible*
- *Posts on 2 or more different days per week (by due dates, Tuesday, Thursday, Sunday), that are brief, or do not meet the qualitative and quantitative standards above, to the professor's questions and at least 5 classmates' responses = 80 – 90% of points possible*
- *Posts on 1 day per week (by due dates, Tuesday, Thursday, Sunday), that meet the qualitative and quantitative standards above, to the professor's questions and at least 5 classmates' responses = 70 – 80% of points possible*
- *Posts on 1 day per week, that do not meet the qualitative and quantitative standards above, to the professor's questions and at least 3 classmates' responses = 60 – 70% of points possible*
- *Any weekly participation that does not meet the minimum standard of the prior bullet will earn between 0 – 50% of points possible*

Finally, just as in a f2f course, all work in this class should be your own, unless a group assignment is made. ***Any words, numbers, statistics, dates, etc. that you take from any source (including your classmates' posts in the Discussion Threads and so forth), must be quoted and cited.***

This grading rubric makes it clear to students the number of days per week they are expected to be working online asynchronously, as well as the number of responses to both the instructor and their peers that they are being evaluated on. Furthermore, this grading rubric makes it clear that their communications are expected to be in a more traditional/formal academic writing format, not informal, text messaging, or email styled responses. In addition, clearly communicating these types of expectations provides another opportunity to remind students of the need to use quotes and citations appropriately, just as they will be expected to do in other written assignments.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter is to point out the potential opportunities for increased student interactions in an online versus face-to-face classroom environment. Whether an online course is synchronous or asynchronous, there are countless options for requiring student interaction, not just with the instructor, but with peers. In addition, an asynchronous online classroom especially provides numerous occasions for faculty to create written communication requirements to aid students in not only improving writing skills, but their abilities to illustrate their research, critical thinking, peer review, feedback, and applied learning. An additional benefit of online course work is the ability to not just eliminate the need for paper documents (from the instructor, as well as students), but also to have all student work archived for future need if it arises. And beyond the environmental and financial benefits of electronic documents and the online storage of course materials and student work, is the option in many course management software programs to copy and use the instructor's materials in future courses without duplicating the effort to reconstruct the class handouts, lecture notes, assignments, videos, texts, etc. However, in order to maximize the opportunities for increased interactions and learning in an online classroom, faculty must be careful to specifically detail what is expected of students, by what dates/times, in both quantity and quality, and the rubrics used for assessing students' work. With these diverse possibilities in online course environments both students and faculty can enhance their learning opportunities, interactions, goals, and pedagogical outcomes.

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CHAPTER 3

THE INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN OF MASSPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

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Over the past few years, the distinction between interpersonal communication and mass communication has broken down very quickly. In fact, it was only four years ago that O'Sullivan and Carr (2017) coined the concept of "masspersonal communication" to illustrate this new convergence. To put it into more conversational terms, mass implies that the messages are being transmitted via technological channels, though the types of interaction taking place qualify as interpersonal. This also sheds light on the fact that "mass communication" is becoming a rather outmoded concept (Westerman et al., 2017). Yes, there are still forms of media in which the consumer is merely a spectator. Remember, however, that most of the popular uses of technology involve some form of interaction. Over the past 35+ years, research in educational media has touted the learning benefits of interactive media, starting with computers, videodiscs, and other devices of the early education technology era. As the years marched onward, Web 2.0 and user-intuitive interface design permeated the marketplace. Eventually, the mobile device brought about a contemporary renaissance in teaching, learning, and life as we knew it. But regardless of the platform, the constant crucial variable for learning has been interaction.

Take a moment to consider the role the audience plays while watching a PowerPoint presentation. What are the audience members doing while the presenter clicks through slide after slide? Very little. So, in essence, they are playing the role of a "mass" audience: staring at the slides with no interaction. Effective presentations are masspersonal, allowing for interactions. Making use of virtual learning technologies, such as discussion forums, allows audience members to be engaged. The COVID-19 pivot to virtual learning forced many educators to make use of such technologies.

At the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly every educator had to devise a "Plan B" for how their students would complete their assignments. Many educators were fearful that the educational quality of their courses would be severely diminished. This particularly rings true in courses that have a public speaking or presentational component, where pedagogy has been slow to evolve from traditional orator preparation (Prentiss, 2021). However, in some cases, "Plan B" ended up becoming even more beneficial than what was originally planned thanks to the interactional instructional technologies available. The following chapter presents a different slant on presentation delivery in a business communication course that makes optimal use of the interactive technologies of the virtual environment and reinvents the "presenter-audience" paradigm in favor of a facilitator-participant situation.

Interactivity and Online Learning

When the outbreak of COVID-19 necessitated a quick transition to remote learning, online learning pedagogy was put to the test more than ever before. Within a few weeks of teaching online, it was revealed that most instructors had little to no training in online teaching (Nicola et al., 2020; Viner et al., 2020). Openo (2020) proposed "three big challenges" with teaching online: (1) interactivity; (2) authenticity; and (3) support. He elaborates:

> Face-to-face or online, the enduring challenges of college accessibility, affordability, and preparation are intensified and further complicated by demographic, economic, and technological changes, which are further intensified by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (p. 2).

Research was conducted across the globe to gauge student and faculty responses to the "new normal" that was online learning, and studies showed that student engagement in online courses, particularly asynchronous courses, had declined (Edy & Widiyanti, 2020; Moffat et al., 2021; Namin et al., 2021). Simultaneously, it was discovered that project-based learning proved to be a beneficial pedagogical choice for online courses, especially during the pandemic (Edy & Widiyanti, 2020; Openo, 2020). Of course, one must remember that online learning, project-based learning and authentic assessment are effective in their own right even without a global pandemic in the equation.

Moore (1989) first delineated the concept of interaction within distance education courses into three types: learner-content; learner-instructor; and learner-learner. While the technical channels we use to deliver content have

expanded drastically since that time, Moore's structure can still inform the design of online instruction. So and Brush (2008) later extended upon Moore's concept, citing the interaction between learner-learner as the most impactful. The implementation literature of early learning management systems (LMS), beginning with EKKO in 1986, stressed the need to encapsulate various forms of human communication (Paulsen & Rekkedal, 2001). By the year 2000, much thanks to the enhanced technical capacities of LMS platforms, distance education courses were capable of both synchronous and asynchronous communication between students and instructor, as well as between and among students enrolled in the course. Researchers began to notice differences in the nature of interaction based upon the format. Chou (2002) stated that synchronous communication is more prone to socializing, whereas asynchronous is more task-oriented.

The LMS has become a generally accepted platform for learning (Fındık-Coşkunçay et al., 2018) and students who interact through discussion forums in these systems are more motivated to fully engage in their coursework (Sulisworo & Santyasa, 2018). The benefits of interactivity across platforms in online courses are numerous, including an increase in student engagement (Cherrett et al., 2009; Dror et al., 2011), motivation (Croxton, 2014), satisfaction with their learning experience (Croxton, 2014; Mahle, 2011). Interactive experiences have been shown to influence student retention in online courses (Huang et al., 2017), as those students who do not interact in some form often fail online courses (Davies & Graff, 2005). Critical to the inclusion of interactivity is the need for varied forms of interaction. As Croxton (2014) notes, "A well-designed online course should not sacrifice interaction, but instead provide an active-learning environment in which students are highly engaged in the learning process through interactions with peers, instructors, and content" (p. 315).

In considering the three types of online course interactivity (c.f., Moore, 1989; So & Brush, 2008), opinions differ in regard to which type is the most beneficial. In his interaction equivalency theorem, Anderson (2003) emphasizes student-student interaction opportunities, with sensitivity to the respective learning styles of the student. Croxton (2014) asserts that student-content interaction is "the strongest student-level predictor of student satisfaction in online courses" (2014, p. 315). At least one form of interactivity must be included in an online course (Anderson, 2003), not only from the standpoint of achieving desired learning outcomes but to establish a community of learning among the students.

To this day, the discussion forum remains one of the most popular means of interaction in an online course and has been praised for their ability to establish a sense of community (Darby, 2020) and that they provide novel

opportunities for high-level thinking and reflection (Thomas, 2002). The key to successful discussion boards is organized and deliberate opportunities for student interaction. Discussions should begin with fun and light opportunities for non-threatening interaction but eventually, build in complexity. Bondie (2020) recommends assigning student facilitators for discussions, thus providing autonomy and a sense of students in control that, while present in the face-to-face classroom can easily be lost in an online course. Once the collaborative experience is over, the instructor should encourage synthesis of what was gained and encourage students to recap their findings (University of Massachusetts Amhurst, 2021). Additionally, by highlighting select students who made notable contributions, or providing "social recognition," a sense of community can be further accomplished.

It is not enough to require interactive elements in an online course, but rather, the design of assessment should integrate opportunities for higher-end learning (Duus, 2009). The integration of authentic assessment, or assessments that require real-world problem solving (Goff et al., 2015) will lead to a more engaging learning experience. A popular form of authentic assessment is project-based learning, which can easily be tailored to accommodate collaboration or independent research (Edy & Widiyanti, 2020; Sulisworo & Santyasa, 2018).

The literature which is summarized above indicates a long-running recognition of the need to include a variety of interactive elements in online teaching. Clearly, interactivity matters in online learning. Given interactivity's role in aiding student retention, contributing to satisfaction and developing a sense of community among learners, it must be a key component for successful assignment design in online courses. This pedagogical credo was pivotal in the re-design of a cumulative final project, as interactivity was vital to the success of the project and remained so following the transition to online learning.

Instructional (Re)Design

Dick and Carey's (2009) Model for Systematic Instructional Design provides a framework that was used for the design of lessons, units, and materials considered in the conversion from face-to-face to online presentation delivery and assessment. This model was used to best adapt a cumulative semester project, which traditionally had a large presentation component, to online delivery.

Following Dick and Carey's (2009) model, the first step was to **identify instructional objectives**. In the business communication course moved