Roles of Online Instructors Apt for Students' Cognitive and Affective learning

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INTRODUCTION

Roles that an online instructor plays in a virtual learning environment are quite different from those in the face-to-face setting. It is inappropriate for an instructor to just attach importance to students' cognition with the use of technology. Students' affective learning is more important than their cognition, because students' emotions affect their quality learning. Therefore, significant is to address roles that instructors play in an online learning environment, which are apt for students' cognitive as well as affective learning.

BACKGROUND

The Paradigm Shift

An increasing number of colleges and universities are transferring their face-to-face classroom meetings (hereafter referred to F2F settings) to online learning environments. Roman, Kelsey, and Lin (2010) and Yang and Cornelius (2005) noted online instruction differed distinctively from the traditional F2F instruction. It is inadequate to primarily focus attention on technology in the development of an online course to increase students' academic growth (Rauscher & Cronje, 2005). It is equally inappropriate to perceive, in terms of online instruction, what have worked in a traditional classroom will certainly work in a virtual learning environment. Teaching and learning in a virtual learning environment is definitely the future trend, as Sun et al. (2008) referred to it as the 'emerged paradigm of modern education' (in Hernández, Gorjup, & Cascón, 2010, p. 168). Hence, in the paradigm shift, there is a need to understand roles that online instructors play in a virtual learning environment (Dennen, Darabi, & Smith, 2007).

Hernandez et al.'s (2010) study focused on the roles an instructor played in both e- and traditional learning environments. The researchers performed a comparative analysis of students' perceptions with 33 participants involved in a F2F traditional teaching while 23 students engaged in an online environment. Both of the groups taught by the same instructor. Hernandez et al. (2010) found there were various students' perceptions regarding the roles that the instructor played in the F2F and online contexts. Generally, F2F group valued the instructor's role in the learning process more highly than the online group. The findings suggest online instructors ought to make additional efforts in order to better facilitate student learning.

Morrison (2012) reported that students of distance education classes performed poorly and some were even not able to complete online courses. Furthermore, there seems to have higher dropout rates within online courses than F2F settings (Morrison, 2012; Rauscher & Cronje, 2005). Therefore, it is certainly useful to address roles that e-instructors play in an online learning context in order to help online instructors, who can in turn help online students.

Students' Affective Learning

According to Rauscher and Cronje (2005), high dropout rate of online learners could be attributed to a lack of motivation. Motivation is closely related to students' affect for learning, which is of their attitudes, beliefs, and values toward learning (McCroskey, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2006). Students' affective learning is inseparable from teacher immediacy, which consists of verbal and nonverbal immediacy. Verbal immediacy is primarily concerned with ways an instructor talks and lectures in the traditional classroom (Chang, 2011a). In contrast, nonverbal immediacy involves behaviors that are only observable to receivers or communicators, such as smile, "eye contact, body position, physical

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proximity, body movement" (Richmond, Gorham, & McCroskey, 1987, in Velez & Cano, 2008, p. 77). Teacher immediacy behaviors communicate positive relational affect (Velez & Cano, 2008). When there exist teacher immediacy behaviors, students feel close to their instructor (Christophel, 1990) and feel motivated to learn (Christophel, 1990; Mottet, Parker-Raley, Beebe, & Cunningham, 2007; Velez & Cano, 2008). In addition, students also have a propensity to take satisfaction responding to questions and actively conceptualize and internalize knowledge (Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, 1964).

Teacher immediacy behaviors, in essence, are central to student learning in a conventional classroom. In an online learning environment or a text-based learning context, however, verbal cues may not always present as in a traditional classroom. Nonverbal cues appear to have no perceptible place to live in an online learning environment (Chang, 2011a; Deutsch, 2013), owing to a lack of multisensory capacities (Chang, 2011a). In such an environment, an instructor should make every effort to increase students' affect for learning (McCroskey et al., 2006). In this sense, it is inappropriate to only focus on students' cognitive development with the inclusion of technology (Rauscher & Cronje, 2005). Van der Horst and McDonald (2001) contended, "... learning is never only cognitive—feelings or attitudes go hand in hand with intellect" (in Rauscher & Cronje, 2005, p. 107).

Rippe (2009) noted that learning not only is emotionally oriented, but also cultivated by interacting with other people, in particular, with a course instructor. An instructor plays various roles crucial to student learning and even more vital to students' affective learning (Chang, 2011a, 2011b). Interactive communication between an instructor and students is social presence (Anderson et al., 2001). Weaver and Albion (2005) endorsed the significance of the instructor's social presence after working with 60 students over a semester using a sequential exploratory design. Weave and Albion (2005) found that the instructor's social presence positively correlated with the students' level of motivation. This study showed when the level of perceived social presence inclined downward as a semester progressed, the degree of students' motivation to learn degraded.

Unfortunately, students' affective learning have been dealt with very superficially (Rauscher & Cronje, 2005). Therefore, it is necessary to address roles played by an online instructor (Rhode, 2008) that are apt for promoting both students' intellect and affective learning.

MAIN FOCUS: ONLINE INSTRUCTORS' ROLES

In the following text, the roles of an e-instructor are characterized horizontally by two categories: Pedagogical Efficacy, which chiefly focuses on the promotion of students' cognition (8 roles in total) and Affective Promotion, which largely focuses on the promotion of students' affective learning (19 roles in total). In the category of Pedagogical Efficacy, there are two subtitles, namely, Knowledge Building (5 roles in total) and Instructional Preparation (2 roles in total). In the category of Affective Promotion, there are three subtitles, namely, Purposeful Commitment (9 roles in total), Purposeful Organization (4 roles in total) and Meaningful Management (6 roles in total).

These roles are also set apart vertically across the two categories of Pedagogical Efficacy and Affective Promotion by three distinct stages, namely, Course Development (7 roles in total), Course Delivery (18 roles in total), and Course Completion (2 roles in total) (see Table 1). To address these roles one by one, the author will present them in the form of stages in order of Course Development, Course Delivery, and Course Completion. When each of the online instructor's roles is addressed in the following text, one of the subtitles along with the name of that particular role is placed in parentheses for easy reading. For example, (Knowledge Building/*Inquiry*) is referred to the role of inquiry an online instructor plays, which appears under Knowledge Building in the category of Pedagogical Efficacy.

COURSE DEVELOPMENT

During the Course Development stage, in the category of Pedagogical Efficacy, the instructor assumes four roles, ranging from those of gaining technological skills to those of getting the course ready for teaching. That is, the instructor is responsible for acquiring necessary and useful technological skills (Knowledge Building /*Inquiry*) and familiarizes the learned skills through practice (Knowledge Building/*Practice*). During this