Chapter 9
Communication With the Blended Student

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ABSTRACT

The ability to communicate effectively, regardless the method, is necessary in all facets of life. In the educational arena, communication between teacher and student has always been a staple of a productive classroom. Unfortunately for today's students and teachers, communication has changed. The days of every student attending a brick-and-mortar classroom are gone. Today's students access technology at a rapid pace via myriad modalities. Some students attend the brick-and-mortar schools, others never step foot inside the facility, while others employ a blended approach to their education. Educators must develop effective techniques to reach these students which engage the learner and reach the course objectives. This chapter focuses on the CoI framework and lists effective communication strategies to communicate with the blended learner. These techniques include a welcome letter, all about me survey, Google forms, email, phone call, text message, reflection assignment, discussion board post, live online class meetings and office hours, and a communication spreadsheet.

COMMUNICATING WITH THE BLENDED STUDENT

Connecting With Students

Online learning is becoming a popular alternative to face to face instruction which requires sustained and relevant interactions between students and educator, utilizing online tools and techniques for communicating. The opportunities for learning online have grown and teachers have scrambled to meet the challenge of online blending learning. Learning does not stop when the student leaves the classroom or campus, and teachers do not stop teaching at the end of the school day (Keene, 2013). The number of

students taking online courses is predicted to increase, and as online blended programs become more popular and readily available, there will be a need to train online teachers on the best ways to use technology to communicate with students (O'Brien, 2015). The blended learning environment may be one where the students and teacher are in a face-to-face (brick-and-mortar) classroom once a week with the remaining work done on their own, or it may be that they meet online once a week in a synchronous setting with no actual live face-to-face time with remaining work completed on their own. There are varying forms of blended learning. For this chapter, blended learning is viewed as meeting online in a synchronous environment once a week while working on the course on their own.

Though online blended learning is growing in popularity, online blended teachers face similar problems as a brick-and-mortar teacher may face in their classroom, but also problems unique to online blended environment. One such problem is maintaining clear communication that permits student engagement from start to finish, that prevents the students from feeling isolated, and effectively decreases the transactional distance gap that can exist. The use of the technology to communicate in the blended learning environment can decrease this distance gap (O'Brien & Fuller, 2018; McBrien, Jones & Cheng, 2009). Transactional distance is an area that teachers need to better understand for communication in this type of learning environment to be successful. The **Transactional Distance Theory** is the idea that there is a physical separation-or gap- between the teacher and student that can ultimately lead to psychological and communicational gaps which then can result in miscommunication and isolation (Moore, 1997). To decrease these transactional distance gaps a teacher can examine the **Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework**, which can help create a meaningful learning experience through the construct of teaching presence, cognitive presence, and social presence (Anderson, Garrison & Archer, 2001; Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007; Garrison, Cleveland-Innes, & Fung, 2010). Dewey's notion of practical inquiry grounded the community of inquiry theoretical framework (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 1999). The CoI framework has evolved progressively as an instrument that is useful for understanding learning activities and pedagogical design in emerging learning environments such as blended learning (Mckerlich Riis, Anders, & Eastman, 2011). This framework has three interconnected components: teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence. The CoI considers learning in any online environment as an inquiry process that involves learners to be actively engage with the teacher, and students, as well as the content, to make meaningful learning. Separately and together, each presence in the CoI model infers some method of interaction in an online blended environment. The teaching presence refers to interaction with teachers, social presence refers to interaction with other students, and cognitive presence refers to interaction with course content.

Teachers can establish a CoI through the creation, implementation, facilitation, and monitoring of cognitive and social processes that can steer student learning goals through a course; monitor and manage student interaction and reflection; and determine learner needs and provide appropriate guidance and information (Anderson, et al, 2001; Garrison et al., 2010). Each component of the CoI framework has a purpose; all together building a sense of community.

- *Social Presence* can be defined as the ability of learners to develop and use their personal characteristics into the community of inquiry, for the purpose of presenting themselves as 'real people' (Anderson, et al, 2001; Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007).
- *Teaching Presence* can be defined as the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally useful learning outcomes (Anderson, et al, 2001; Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007).

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