

Chapter 7

Trifecta of Student Engagement: A Framework for Engaging Students in Online Courses

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes a framework adapted from Michael Moore's three essential areas: student-content interaction, student-student interaction, and student-instructor interaction for engaging students in online courses. To be fully engaged in an online course, students need to be engaged with the course curriculum content, with their peers, and with their instructor. When students are engaged in all three areas, it is referred to as the Trifecta of Student Engagement. This chapter incorporates literature on each area of the Trifecta of Student Engagement: student-to-content engagement, student-to-student engagement, and student-to-instructor engagement as well as some suggested synchronous and asynchronous digital tools.

INTRODUCTION

Student engagement is an important concept when designing and teaching online courses (Meyer, 2014; Wankel & Blessinger, 2012; Everett, 2015). Although there is a lack of agreement on a single definition, student engagement has been associated with positive outcomes such as student success and development (Mayhew, et. al., 2016). According to the Glossary of Education Reform (2016, n. p.), student engagement “refers to the degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism, and passion that students show when they are learning or being taught, which extends to the level of motivation they have to learn and progress in their education.” Engaging students is a learner-centered teaching approach that has been recognized in education as being effective (Beaudoin, 1990; Darsih, 2018; Schreurs & Dumbraveanu, 2014). The term *engagement* in this chapter will focus on the asynchronous and synchronous strategies aimed at attracting student interest, attention, and motivation to learn as well as some suggested online tools that can facilitate student interaction.

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Trifecta of Student Engagement

Focusing on student engagement for online courses can impact the course experience for students and can improve their satisfaction, learning, and achievement (Leslie, 2019). In an online teaching professional development program, faculty who utilized teaching strategies that focused on student engagement saw an improvement in student grades, higher scores on teaching evaluations, and had students report that their learning improved. Research states that student engagement has been positively associated with student academic achievement, progression, retention, graduation, satisfaction, and deeper learning (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2017; Zilvinskis, Masseria, & Pike, 2017; Lei, Yunhuo, & Zhou, 2018). Focusing on strategies that engage students, then, can positively impact student success.

BACKGROUND

One of the major conduits of student engagement in online courses is interaction (Wanstreet, 2009). Interaction allows students to exchange ideas and construct meaning individually and with course participants. Further, interaction in online courses has shown to have a direct impact on student satisfaction, student achievement, and learning outcomes (Durrington, et al., 2006; Bernard et al., 2009). In his seminal research, Michael Moore (1989) outlined three types of interaction in online courses: learner-content interaction, learner-learner interaction, and learner-instructor interaction. Student-content interaction is “the process of intellectually interacting with content that results in changes in the learner’s understanding, the learner’s perspective, or the cognitive structures of the learner’s mind” (Moore, 1989, p. 2). Learner-learner interaction is the process of learners collaborating and communicating information with peers, which can be especially valuable in the areas of application and evaluation (Sharp & Huett, 2006). Learner-instructor interaction “is widely considered essential by educators and students alike. This interaction type includes three tasks to be performed by the instructor: to stimulate interest and motivation; to organize application of student learning; and to counsel, support, and encourage each learner” (Sharp & Huett, 2006, p. 4). It is important to note that the quality of interaction, including personalization and meaningful communication, impacts student satisfaction with the overall learning experience (Eom & Wen, 2006). A framework for student engagement, based on the three types of interaction, is referred to as the Trifecta of Student Engagement (Figure 1). This framework proposes that students, to be fully engaged in a course, need to regularly and meaningfully interact with their course curriculum content, with their peers, and with their instructor.

The Trifecta of Student Engagement categorizes student engagement into three areas: student-to-content engagement, student-to-student engagement, and student-to-instructor engagement. Each area of the Trifecta intersects and overlaps with one another in a student-centered online learning community (Hoidn, 2017). The chapter is divided into the following sections:

- The Student-to-Content Engagement section focuses on motivational strategies that challenge and inspire students to engage with content.
- The Student-to-Student Engagement section focuses on social learning theory and constructivist approaches to facilitate student engagement with their peers.
- The Student-to-Instructor Engagement section focuses on building connections with students and faculty through feedback and communication strategies.

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