Chapter 3
Online Teaching Needs Ongoing Student Engagement

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ABSTRACT

The online educator uses many techniques to engage and motivate students to create a classroom community. The virtual teacher creates positive experiences and interactions that propel the student forward educationally and socially. The professor builds a relationship using interpersonal interactions with email, video, or the school website. Personal outreach inspires the student to want to participate. The teacher is an ally, helping the student be successful. Effective feedback, whether in discussion board, seminar, or assignments, must be specific, culturally sensitive, and respectful, using a variety of techniques to bring students out of isolation to build the classroom community. Student engagement should be continuous and motivating. The teacher encourages and assists, working on student success and persistence. The instructor creates a community of learners, who participate in a social interchange, that helps them solidify the information and reach curriculum and classroom goals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research is powerful, supporting what is known within the world of education. Despite this, while research is consistent with findings within a study, life in the classroom varies based on the teacher, the students, the environment, and the subject matter. While research has been tested and validated on a finite population, the ability to replicate a study is impacted by what is happening both within the on-ground and on-line classroom. Little research has been done on the integration of research data into classroom teaching.

Research offers guidance and tools that may impact the outcome of student's learning. Many professors try to apply the research, as best practices, within the classroom. This is not always successful. "Research

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often evaluates a specific practice or program and its impact on the child's education outcome" (Boser & McDaniels, 2018). The challenge with this principle is that every student is different, their needs differ, and teacher/student interactions will vary within each classroom. For instance, what works in one classroom might need to be altered for another class. Even when the instructor is consistent, outcomes vary based on the diverse population of the attendees.

"Research alone does not change practice. This is true in every field, be it engineering, education, or law" (Boser & McDaniels, 2018). Reading the research and understanding its principles does not inform the practitioner on how to apply the information. For example, while scientific proof of how an infant's brain learns and grows first was published in the 1990's, the application into education took many years. One of the first widely reported research studies on the emerging brain was the Carnegie Corporation's report, *Years of Promise* in 1996, followed by an article in the New York Times and a Newsweek Magazine report on the scientific discoveries (Bruer, 1999). All alluded to the change that would be coming out of the neuroscience research of the brain and a breakthrough in parenting and education, but there was not a clear bridge between the research and application into the classroom (Bruer, 1999). It took many years for ideas to percolate and the brain science to filter into some classrooms. To this day, many practices have changed and other, long accepted educational theories, prevail. "Studies are not enough to shift the day-to-day practice and habits of professionals; just putting information into someone's hands does not help them understand how to use that information to improve their work" (Boser & McDaniels, 2018).

There is little research on the connection between studies proving certain philosophical principles and teaching practices (Kumagai & Johnson Black, 2018). Educators are "influenced by their own past experiences of learning and some of the broad traditions of adult education, yet arguably of greater interest was the finding that adult educators' philosophies of teaching were also influenced by their current practice, their interaction with learners, and the challenges of the day-to-day learning context" (Jenkins, 2011). That doesn't mean professors of education just ignore research. As explained in the article Research vs Experience in Classroom Practice, "you can consider yourself a connected educator whilst you may not read research journals you most likely keep abreast of changes to pedagogical thinking and approaches."

Often, research is written at a level that some teachers cannot understand the vocabulary used and are so erudite that they stop reading. Much research is not relevant to their day-to-day teaching and does not tell them how to put the research into practice. "Not research but experience, experience built on the foundation of hours of planning, trying, adapting, trying again, reflecting and so on" (Research vs Experience in Classroom Practice, 2015). Therefore, this chapter will be about experiential methods to boost student engagement.

CREATING A TEACHING PRESENCE

While there are similarities in the online and ground classroom in student-teacher interaction, there are many techniques that an online educator must employ to engage and motivate students, create a classroom community, and add instructor and student presence (Watwood, et al., 2015). The virtual teacher tries to create positive experiences and interactions that propel the student forward educationally and socially.

The online educator should establish a teaching presence immediately, to help the student feel a connection by communicating as the class begins, welcoming and personalizing the outreach. In most instances, the initial welcome and first live class or seminar will set the tone for the entire classroom learning environment (Wong & Wong, 2018).