

# Chapter 4

## Emotion and Online Learning

**Ileana Torres**

*The Chicago School of Professional Psychology, USA*

**Aubrey Statti**

*The Chicago School of Professional Psychology, USA*

**Kelly M. Torres**

*The Chicago School of Professional Psychology, USA*

### **ABSTRACT**

*Emotion plays a critical role in learning, including the online learning experience. However, without the proper tools for engagement, online learning can be an isolating experience. The importance of emotion in teaching and learning is as essential to consider as the curriculum itself. Instructors should consider strategies for promoting emotional presence and engagement in online learning environments and the ways in which emotions influence student's motivation, decision making, and ultimately, the learning process. The chapter provides an overview of the importance of considering the connection between emotion and online learning as well as some of the research that addresses the ways in which to create emotionally sound online courses where the emotional needs of online learners are met.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The following review of literature provides an overview of the research that has been conducted on the topic of the emotional needs among online students. The review is divided into two major themes, which include: emotion and learning and emotion and online learning. The first theme, emotion and learning, is included to provide the connection between the two variables and to also to share background information

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on the topic of emotion and learning in general. Under this main theme, research discussing the following sub-headings is reviewed: effects on learning, emotion in the classroom, the different definitions of emotion, the different sources of emotion, positive and negative emotions experiences in the classroom, the constructivist learning perspective and constructivist learning and course design.

The next major theme is emotion in the online learning environment. The following additional topics are covered under this major theme: the connection between emotion and learning in an online classroom, the importance of social presence, the needs and expectations of online students, student engagement, and the ways in which engagement can be increased in online learning environments, the role of emotion in online learning environments, the issue of persistence and a discussion of the higher rates of attrition in online education, the importance of an emotional presence in an online course and also research related to the building of an emotion presence.

## **BACKGROUND**

Educators have been interested in further examining the role of emotion and affect and their importance in adult learning (Dirkx, 2008). Within the last 25 years, closer attention has been paid to the emotional aspects of teaching and learning and has become a major theme in the literature (Dirkx, 2008). There is interest among educators in further understanding the connection between learning and the way emotions affect the learning process (Baumeister, et al., 2007; Linnenbrink-Garcia et al., 2011; Shuck et al., 2007). While much of the research has emphasized the positive contributions of emotion on learner motivation and self-esteem, there also still exists the notion that emotions can be disruptive to effective teaching and learning (Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012). Traditionally, the approach to thinking and feeling or emotion or cognition has been to view them as opposites (Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012; O'Regan, 2003). Because of the view that emotions are considered uncontrollable, irrational, or untrustworthy, the implications have been that emotion should remain separate from cognition (O'Regan, 2003; Storebeck & Clore, 2007). The following discussion on the topic of emotion and learning helps to provide an overview of some of the research in this field of study and will provide an introduction to the research that has specifically focused on emotion in online learning environments. The review of literature illustrates the importance and need for further research in this area in order to understand how emotion affects learning, specifically in an online learning environment and what staff and faculty in higher education institutions can do to better support the emotional needs of their students.

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