



Creating Teacher Immediacy in Online Learning Environments

D'Agustino, Steven, ed.
IGI Global, 2016

Book Review

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A key issue in distance education is how to establish a vital two-way, personal communication between learner and instructor. Borje Holmberg, among other theorists, argues that the primary role of an instructor is to empathize with the learner; imparting information is a secondary matter. What, then, are the most effective ways to form a dyadic alliance between a learner and instructor? This is the major question that D'Agustino's *Creating Teacher Intimacy in Online Learning Environments* seeks to answer.

This is a reference work, so it can be read profitably article by article or completely. The volume begins with a helpful detailed table of contents that provides a brief synopsis of each chapter. There is also a useful foreword by Karen P. Kaun which underscores the importance of the human component in teaching and learning regardless of the instructional format. The preface speaks to the impact of the "interactive turn," the "undesigned remainder," and the "modelling function" in asynchronous learning. In addition, there is a brief description of each chapter that complements the summaries in the table of contents. Every chapter also starts with an abstract and an introduction.

Pedagogy, not technology, is the focus of each chapter. Therefore, this reference is valuable for course designers, media specialists, instructors, and researchers across a range of academic disciplines. That said, there are a few chapters that all will want to read and ponder.

Oliver Dreon's "Building Teaching Presence in Online Classes," for example, provides an overview of the main issues along with strategies that support learning and interaction. A list of design principles is included, suggestions for future research are indicated, and there is a concise paragraph of conclusions plus an extensive list of references. A central contention

made by Dreon is that practices that contribute to high quality, traditional undergraduate instruction also apply to establishing meaningful instructor presence in online classes.

Many readers will also want to look closely at Caroline M. Crawford's "Instructor Immediacy and Authenticity: Engaging in Cognitive Vulnerability within the Instructional Environment." Often, learner success in an online course – synchronous or asynchronous – will largely depend on the instructor's efforts to generate worthwhile interactive opportunities. These activities require that the instructor have a clear philosophical belief system united with an understanding of the learner's cognitive vulnerability in an online environment. Crawford explores these core issues while calling for the development of a "talent propelled" instructional environment.

Neal Shambaugh's "Interactivity and Immediacy in Online Academic Programs" addresses quality issues in higher education distance classes. This is an important theme because, as D'Agustino notes in the preface, "online learning still has a perceived lack of legitimacy" (xxiv). Shambaugh advocates interactivity as a method to counter this concern. He offers a list of best practices for creating and sustaining online immediacy. Then he sketches a series of recommendations for undergraduate, master's, doctoral, and specialized programs, such as teacher education, certificates, and professional development.

There is an extensive compilation of references and notes about the contributors that conclude this collection. The references alone are an excellent guide for further research and course syllabi.

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