Chapter 4

Identifying and Constructively Engaging Learner Resistances in the Online Classroom

ABSTRACT

Learner resistances—based on learning frustrations, differing world views, personality differences, political aims, and other challenges—occur in online learning contexts as they do in face-to-face learning ones, but they may be missed by the teachers and even peers given the lack of non-verbal communications and informal contexts when indicators of such resistances may occur. This work addresses what learner resistances are and what causes them based on a review of the literature. Then, this work suggests some ways to identify learner resistances in online learning contexts and constructively engaging such resistances (to affirm learners, address identified issues, and promote learning, while maintaining factuality).

INTRODUCTION

Some common teaching and learning dynamics are generally thought to exist in an online and face-to-face (F2F) learning contexts. One common phenomenon is learner resistance, based on learning frustrations, differing world views with their teachers, personality differences, political aims, and other challenges.

- *A student has attended class a few times but has not ever turned in any homework. She does not return phone calls or emails. Meanwhile, the date for dropping the course without penalty is fast approaching.*
- *A group of students in the middle of the room talks through lectures. They hand notes to each other. They are clearly aware that they are being watched by the other students, but that seems to be part of the attraction of their behaviors.*
- *A student goes online to a teacher rating site and posts a scathing review of a professor for one of his courses.*
- *An instructor has given incomplete grades to a team of students in her course. They had plagiarized the contents for their website. The team lays the blame on one student who was in charge of writing the contents. However, the course was designed with group grades. The team requests a meeting with the instructor's supervisor. They want to force her to reinstate their initial grades before she realized the plagiarism has occurred. She insists that they do the work ethically, and she will then re-grade their work and formalize their records.*
- *A group of students from across the college has marched on the student newspaper staff. The group is concerned because the student newspaper ran ads that the group disagrees with. The staff explain that they have enabled advertisers on both sides of the issue to advertise. After the protesters have made their displeasure known, they finally leave the offices. The student newspaper staff discuss the issues. The tensions remain.*

Learner resistance can involve avoiding assigned work, ranking up absenteeism, disavowing responsibility, disrespecting peers and the instructor, purposefully sabotaging work, and other endeavors. One operationalized definition of "learner resistance" is defined as "any overt or covert behavior on the part of the learner hindering or shutting down open dialogue" in the educational setting (Monaghan, 2003, p. 8). "Overt behavior is further

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