Teacher Presence

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INTRODUCTION

The impact of the online instructor, whom one may label an instructional facilitator, within distributed learning environments has become a topic of interest over the previous decades. The impact of the instructor is not only clear within a traditional face-to-face and blended learning environment, but is also vitally important within a distributed learning environments. Although the impact of the instructor upon the learner's experience and subject matter understanding has not been fully understood, the needs revolving around instructor presence within distributed learning environments are not merely motivational in nature. Instead, instructor presence also serves as a facilitative guide, self-regulatory maven, cognitive load support system, and the mentor-focused instructional effort towards not merely cognitive understanding but also towards higher order thinking skills and associated subject matter engagement.

BACKGROUND

Within the bounds of a discussion related to the concept of teacher presence within an instructional environment, there has been intriguing work revolving around the concept of the teacher's impact upon the instructional environment for decades. Of interest is the distinct engagement within this subject during the 1980s and again arising in the later 1990s due to the introduction of instructional technologies and distributed learning environments into the instructional environment. A discussion revolving around understandings related to teacher presence and subsequent impacts upon the instructional environment are addressed. Se-

cifically, focusing upon the subjects of discourse, reflective practices, and motivational needs of the learner.

Towards supporting this understanding, Ladyshewsky (2013) engaged in the impact of the instructor's presence upon the learner satisfaction, and is in strong company with current instructor presence engagement in online courses (Bowers & Kumar, 2015; Hodges & Cowan, 2012; Lowenthal, 2009; Sheridan & Kelly, 2010) and associated multimedia-based efforts towards the suggestion of instructor presence (Young, Hicks, Villa-Lobos & Franklin, 2014), as well as professional associations' efforts towards supporting the engagement of teachers within online learning environments (NEA, n. d.). The teacher presence efforts and associated student perceptions surrounding teacher presence are currently intriguing and worthy of further consideration.

Discourse

The concept of discourse within an instructional event is of significant interest. The importance of discourse is not only due to the inherent social engagement of the learner within an instructional environment, but also upon the understanding of the teacher's instructional and facilitative impact upon the learner. As well, the communal understandings revolving around practices within the institutions that undergird the instructional efforts directly impact the concept of discourse within the instructional environment.

Social Discourse: Words We Use

The instructional process is a socially framed effort, no matter whether learning occurs within a

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face to face instructional environment, a blended learning approach, a distributed learning approach or even a mobile instructional environment. The ways that people learn new knowledge and information is framed through a socially mediated environment. For this reason, an introductory discussion that focuses upon the words that are implemented throughout the social discourse effort are vitally important. An initial point of interest is Wittgenstein's (1961) research that engaged in an understanding about the words that people implement within an instructional environment, not only to frame an understanding of the knowledge but also perceptions revolving around the nuanced understandings of the knowledge. The word choices of the instructors, the word choices of the learners and perceptions of understanding as framed through these word choices directly impact the learning environment's social discourse. Word choices reflect one's understanding of the knowledge, as well as the nuanced subject matter understandings. The simplistic shift of the instructor's word choice, from "student" to "learner colleague" or merely "colleague", directly impacts the perception of the learners within the instructional environment. One example is offered by a master's student towards the end of a semester-long course, when stated "I also appreciate that you view us as colleagues and not just students. Thank You!!" (personal communication, 27 April 2016), suggesting that the labels and terminology articulated by the instructor not only reflects upon the community endeavor and style of engagement but also upon the perception of the instructor's presence within the course environment.

Further, one may consider Vygotsky's (1933/1966, 1935, 1981) work as pertains to the ways that people understand the knowledge within the instructional environment as conceptually framed through social understandings. Ways that instructors and learners talk about the knowledge within an instructional environment is important, just as the socially relevant engagement with the subject matter more fully frames the learner's understandings of the information through

knowledge checks and corrections in developing understandings of the information. Following on this thought process is Cherryholmes' (1988) structural understanding of discourse as it is bound by the conception of time and place. Meaning, the instructionally relevant discourse that occurs within a socially relevant and engaged environment is supported by the short-term memory understandings that are bound by the instructor's and collegial learner's efforts. Discourse is inherently framed through a cognitively conceptual engagement within a specific time and place cognitive understanding. The usage of the information learned falls within a specific locale and a specific point in time; as such, understanding this information is also bound by the developmental appropriateness of the learner working with this information, as well as the engagement of the instructor within the social discourse that further frames the learner's understanding of the information. Of interest is the shift from social discourse towards patterns of behavior, distinctly framed within the practices of the instructional institutions; although each is directly relevant and supports the other, these are distinctly separate events and practices.

Patterns of Behavior and Practices of Institutions

The language of the instructional environment and the language choices of the instructor directly impact the learner within any type of instructional environment. Not only does the type of discourse occurring reflect differentiated patterns of behavior directly related to the subject matter understanding within the field. However, the instructor's discourse style and discourse engagement with the learners may directly impact the learner's understanding of the subject matter as well as the learner's success associated with knowledge attainment and holistic engagement with the subject matter (Smith & Zantiotis, 1988). The terms implemented by the instructor, the ways through which the chosen texts represent the information and even the multimedia products

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