

Chapter 4

Motivate to Educate: Mentoring Online Adult Learners

Melissa R. McDowell

Angelo State University, USA

Twyla J. Tasker

Angelo State University, USA

ABSTRACT

In post-pandemic higher education, faculty face the challenge of motivating and engaging adult learners in the online learning environment. This chapter provides a theoretical foundation, evidence-based strategies, and tried-and-true examples of mentoring online adult learners to motivate and engage them through their educational journey. The Community of Inquiry framework is introduced as the foundation for online instruction. Adult learning theory provides the foundation for meeting learner needs. The chapter features specific evidence-based strategies that have been successfully implemented in undergraduate and graduate online learning environments as a means of motivating students. These strategies provide opportunities for faculty to provide focused feedback to students by teaching, coaching, mentoring, and guiding them through learning activities involving peer review and self-reflection.

INTRODUCTION

In post-pandemic higher education, faculty face the challenge of motivating and engaging adult learners in the online learning environment. This chapter provides a theoretical foundation, evidence-based strategies, and tried-and-true examples of mentoring online adult learners to motivate and engage them through their educational journey. The Community of Inquiry framework is introduced as the foundation for online instruction. Adult learning theory provides the foundation for meeting learner needs. The chapter features specific evidence-based strategies that have been successfully implemented in undergraduate and graduate online learning environments as a means of motivating students. These strategies provide opportunities for faculty to provide focused feedback to students by teaching, coaching, mentoring, and guiding them through learning activities involving peer review and self-reflection. The strategies are

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presented so that faculty engaged in online learning environments will be able to utilize them to motivate their own students; however, these strategies would be valuable in hybrid or traditional face-to-face learning environments as well.

This chapter will answer the following questions about motivating adult learners in the online learning environment:

- How can faculty design online courses to ensure students know them as teachers, instructors, subject matter experts, and professionals even though they do not meet face-to-face?
- How can faculty motivate adult learners to engage with the content while learning at a distance?
- How can faculty facilitate interaction among adult learners when online courses are taught asynchronously?
- What specific instructional strategies and learning activities will motivate and engage adult learners?
- What strategies could maintain the momentum for adult learners in the online learning environment?

COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY FRAMEWORK

In the online learning environment, success for students is often dependent upon the connections they form – not only with their content but also with their colleagues and their instructors (Fiock, 2020; Garrison, 2007; Sadaf, et al., 2022; Trespalacios & Perkins, 2016). These connections form the primary factors identified in the Community of Inquiry framework as a means to structure asynchronous online learning and ensure a sense of community (Garrison, 2007). The Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework includes “three elements – social, teaching, and cognitive presence,” which intersect to create the optimum educational experience for the online learner (Garrison, 2007, p. 62). Though instructors in higher education have become more adept at presenting content online particularly given the recent advancement in online instructional resources, they often struggle with interacting with students in a meaningful way in the online environment. The initial framework was constructed to define the elements of the educational experience for students in “asynchronous, text-based group discussions” (Garrison et al., 2010). The framework of community was grounded in the constructivist work of John Dewey who believed that education and inquiry were dependent on community and social interaction (Dewey, 1910; Fiock, 2020; Garrison, 2007; Garrison et al., 2010).

The framework pictured in Figure 1 shows the relationship of the teaching, social, and cognitive presences in the online environment (Garrison, 2007).

As the figure illustrates, while each presence overlaps to create a relationship with another presence and create an educational experience at the core, each has its own autonomous definition, process, and concepts.

TEACHING PRESENCE

At the core of any course is the instruction, the teaching presence. Garrison (2007) defines teaching presence as “a significant determinant of student satisfaction, perceived learning, and a sense of community” (p. 67). Whether teaching online, in a hybrid delivery model, or face-to-face, teaching involves

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