1) An online support system to scaffold real-world problem solving


This article describes the design components and the effectiveness of an Electronic Performance Support System for solving “real world” problems. The intention is for the support system to be reusable, and for the tools to scaffold “complex problem solving processes.” The support system is designed with a constructivist, “open-ended learning environment” grounded in cognitive learning theories such as David Merrill’s Instructional Transactional Theory. The components of the support systems are: a case library, question prompts, peer review, expert modeling, and self-reflection. The author compares the PSSS to Intelligent Tutoring Systems (ITS) and Computer Supported Collaborative Learning environments (CSCL) and discusses the advantages and disadvantages of both. In an open ended learning environment, scaffolding may be required for novice learners. The EPSS incorporates scaffolding with question prompts. The instructor has the ability to set the level of scaffolding, ranging from low level to high level detailed question prompts. The reader is then guided through a case study and shown the process of how the online support system works. The case study was a patient asthma problem within a pharmacy domain. Finally, the article presents two empirical studies and results utilizing the support system. I will briefly describe one of those studies in which the effects of detailed question prompts are examined. A random sampling of sixty-three students comprised the treatment and control groups. Both groups were required to complete a case study on needs assessment taken from the case library. The experimental group received high level questioning prompts, but the control did not receive the prompts.

The beginning of the article guides the reader through the learning support system using a case example. The case utilizes a pharmacy domain where third year pharmacy students analyze and solve a problem as a lab activity. The students are asked an open-ended question. The students are divided into groups of four, and once every student has responded, an email is sent to each student in the group, asking them to review and compare their peer’s work in order to revise their own response. Once this is complete, the professor provides expert knowledge to the problem. The students reflect and again revise their work. The author asserts the peer review and expert feedback components of the support system are effective at improving and developing problem solving skills.
I teach several sections of public speaking at the college level. Students are required to deliver four speeches throughout the semester. Using a feedback form, I critique organization, content, delivery, etc. of the speech. Each student is also required to critique a peer. My hope has been that student speeches would improve through the exercise of critiquing their peers. Also, by receiving my feedback and peer critiques, I have assumed speeches would improve. Sometimes students read my feedback and incorporate my feedback into their next speech. Most often students continue to make the same mistakes in future speeches. Many times I have written on all four speeches for the same student the same comment: “project your voice more, develop more thorough transitions, rely less on your notes – speak more with the audience, cite sources more distinctly, etc.”. This article gave me the idea to ask my students to examine my comments (which means they will have to read my handwriting) and peer reviews, to reflect, and then write a paragraph or two on what they will do differently and/or continue to do well in the proceeding speech. Why haven’t I thought of this before? It’s so practical. The assignment will ask students to review my comments and peer critiques, reflect on their own performance, and tell me what they will do differently and how they will improve their next speech given the feedback. I will replace a multiple choice quiz with this assignment. I am already confident that this assignment will provide my students with a richer learning experience and a deeper understanding of public speaking than a multiple choice quiz.

2) Designing online courses: a taxonomy to guide strategic use of features available in course management systems (CMS) in distance education


This article examines a graduate level education course unsuccessfully repurposed for an online environment at a northern-eastern university (Syracuse). Instructors used a computer management system (CMS) to develop the course in an online format. They mapped the course content in a linear instructional fashion. The course was entitled “The Principles of Learning and Instruction,” and the course objectives covered learning theories in behaviorism, social learning, and cognitivism with the intent of engaging the student in “active experiences.” The online course and the course design failed due to inappropriate or inadequate use of the features within the CMS. The article states the features were “haphazardly integrated” with no forethought on the design. The article also stated, “easy integration” with a CMS does not necessarily equate to “good design,” and “poor design” will hinder the learning process. The design and course strategies did not “match” the course objectives and expectations. Through course evaluation feedback and use of a new design strategy (taxonomy) presented in this article by the authors, the online course was redesigned for effective learning and facilitation. The original classroom course utilized an experimental learning model incorporating a four-step process of learning: “doing, reflecting, understanding, and applying.” The
“experimental activity” component that was crucial and core in the face-to-face classroom course was lost in the online translation. In redesigning the more effective online course, instructional strategies as well as the “use” of features within the CMS were retooled to engage “active experiences.” The new design delivered ratings of the retooled online course equivalent if not higher on items such as “intellectual challenge and discussions” than the traditional classroom course ratings. (The retooled course received higher ratings than the first online course in all categories.)

As I read this article, I made many mental notes on how good instructional design and good graphic design are very similar. Although instructional online design is a much more complex and time consuming process, it has much in common with graphic design. With the advent of computer management systems and development of online courses, designers have had a tendency to want to incorporate the latest and greatest technologies (features) that come with the CMS, but with no real purpose, forethought, or strategy. When random features are used in creating online design for no specific reason, the learning and learning processes are hindered. Similarly in graphic design when text, color, and images are arbitrarily placed on a page, no visual connection of design elements, with no forethought and lack of conceptualization of what these design elements convey, the communication process is hindered. In both instances, poor design hampers the outcome.

Anything that hinders the communication process is known as noise. There are many varieties of noise such as semantic: the person does not understand the terminology used; physical noise: poor design, poor contrast, difficult to read, interference on a computer network; psychological noise: the person disagrees with the message. I think both instructional designers and graphics designers need to understand noise and integrate techniques that avoid interference of the message.

In the NonDesigner’s Design Book, author Robin Williams (not the comedian), asserts good design is the bridge between the mission, vision, objectives, goals, and the audience. Good design does not get in the way, but enhances the communication process. Applying this to an online instructional setting, good instructional design helps facilitate teaching and learning without obstructing the process. There must be a reason, a strategy for why a particular feature is used in a CMS. Likewise, there must be a reason why a particular design element is used and a strategy for its placement on a page.

This article thoroughly details how to design individual components of an online course to engage the student in active experiential learning. The article also provided a two page matrix (taxonomy) of common CMS features, their definitions, primary type, value for teaching and learning. This was my favorite article! Although this article is five years old, I found it invaluable and relevant, a resource I will refer to as I continue to learn about instructional design in an online learning environment.

3) The impact of intrinsic motivation on e-learning in authentic computer tasks

This study analyzed behaviors (“what students actually do”) in an authentic e-learning environment in search of answers to solve a problem or “to gain a better understanding of the problem.” The authors are interested in “linking instructional strategies, motivational processes and learning outcomes.” They hypothesized that students with higher levels of intrinsic motivation put forth more effort. Thirty-three higher education participants volunteered for the study. They were placed in the position of a junior consultant for a bus company and had to write a report about absences due to illness. Through a simulator in which user judgments and user behavior affected each other, participants searched for answers and data to complete their reports. Log files on decisions made and information viewed were analyzed to score for explorative behavior. Content statements in the reports were analyzed to score factual knowledge gained. The participants were given three hours to perform the task.

Surprisingly, the study revealed students with higher levels of intrinsic motivation did not actually put forth more effort. The results indicated that students with increased intrinsic motivation “do things differently” and exhibited different behaviors. One of these attributes was explorative behavior. This study makes a positive correlation between intrinsic motivation and explorative behaviors. However, an administered multiple choice post-test and content statements analyzed revealed no correlation to intrinsic motivation. The authors suggest that the methods to assess performance are focused on facts, not rewarding explorative behaviors.

The authors suggest the traditional classroom setting does not reward students for curiosity and exploratory behaviors that are inherent attributes of intrinsic motivation. Doing so could stifle intrinsic motivation. In *Punished by Rewards*, Dr. Alfie Kohn compiled research studies showing the negative impact of extrinsic motivators on intrinsic motivation. Setting up rewards for curiosity and exploratory behaviors would be killing the goose that laid the golden egg so to speak. How do we nurture creativity, curiosity, and intrinsic motivation? Give people jobs that are fun to do and teach things that are fun to learn. Intrinsic motivation is innate, but can be stifled.

Of course, this study was conducted within the constraints of a classroom and a simulated event. The students were given only three hours to explore the problem via a simulator and write a case study. In addition, this study was not able to link intrinsic motivation to learning outcomes; however, it takes a long time to master a craft or subject area. I would hypothesize that those students with higher levels of intrinsic motivation and explorative behaviors will show those outside of the classroom setting. With learning as its own reward, they may achieve more in the long-term than their extrinsically motivated classmates, who stop once the prize is obtained. Students who
are intrinsically motivated are more likely to be lifelong learners in one or more subject areas and according to the article are “more likely to achieve set goals.”

This particular article reinforced the point for me that constructivist learning approaches to research and learning take considerable more time in all dimensions.

4) Examining Teacher Verbal Immediacy and Sense of Classroom Community in Online Classes


This study posits teacher verbal immediacy (“behaviors that reduce social and psychological distance”) in online pedagogy (text based, asynchronous) has a positive correlation between sense of community, learner satisfaction, perceived learning and posting frequency. Two hundred and fourteen individuals enrolled in online courses, both people-oriented as well as task-oriented courses, participated. The author discusses two theories that guided his hypothesis and supported his research, Moore’s Transactional Distance Theory and Holmberg’s Guided Didactic Conversation Theory. He also developed a Likert scaled instrument for teacher verbal immediacy using these theories. The results revealed a significant positive correlation between teacher verbal immediacy and online discussion postings, especially in people-oriented courses. There were no significant positive correlations between teacher verbal immediacy and learner satisfaction, sense of community, or perceived learning. One explanation the author postulates for this is that all of the participants are of the “ages of 30 or over.” Adult learners may have an independent learning style not requiring a personal connection with the teacher and “they may focus more on the content.”

Aust suggests the significant positive correlation between teacher verbal immediacy and frequency of posting could be explained by a student’s need to “impress the teacher.” Also, students may post more often when the teacher’s messages are “more inviting.” I agree with the author that students will be compelled to become involved with online discussions when the teacher is intentional about engaging student interaction. However, I disagree with the explanation that students want to “impress the teacher.” Especially, from this group of 214 participants ages 30 and over. In addition, the author contradicts himself in asserting that adult learners have less of a need for a personal connection with the teacher, yet they want to impress the teacher? There was a disconnect in the logic of the explanation of the results.

I thought of how the results might change with a younger group of participants, perhaps, undergraduate freshmen. Freshmen, making one of the largest transitions in their lives, would most likely have a greater need for a teacher-student connection in an online environment. Surveying freshman might reveal a significant positive correlation between teacher verbal immediacy and sense of community.
I also wondered how the results may differ with participants who are solely in online programs versus participants that are in hybrid on-campus/online programs. My hypothesis: there would not be a significant positive relationship between teacher verbal immediacy and sense of community for students enrolled in hybrid programs. They have a lesser need for a teacher-student connection in an online course because that connection is being met in the face-to-face courses.

I did find this article very interesting. The article peeked my interest in Moore’s Transactional Distance Theory, and I would like to know more about ways to enhance a sense of community –teacher to student connection, student to student connection in online courses. Teacher verbal immediacy and Holmberg’s Guided Didactic Conversation Theory are new concepts I find very interesting as well. They could guide my next steps in the research process.

5) The effect of computer-mediated communication on anonymous end-of-course teaching evaluations


This article compares end of the semester course evaluations of similar courses in face-to-face and in online classrooms. Open-ended questions from the evaluations were analyzed. Examples of open-ended questions are: 1) What was your most significant learning experience in the course?, and 2) What was your greatest disappoint about the course? Researchers reviewed 202 anonymous responses, 141 online and 61 face-to-face within a four year period from doctoral level research and statistic courses within the schools of education and psychology. Using a qualitative approach, comments were assigned one of three descriptive categories: 1) praise, 2) constructive criticism, 3) destructive criticism. Eight hundred and twelve remarks were classified into the three categories. There were significant differences between the online and face-to-face formats in the three evaluative categories. The online course received significantly more remarks in the praise (33%) and destructive criticism comments (21%) and less constructive criticism (44%) comments than the face-to-face course evaluations; praise (29%), destructive criticism (13%), constructive criticism (56%). The authors suggest a greater number of constructive criticism comments in the face-to-face courses were due to students having a deeper connection with the teacher, course, and institution.

As I read this article, the first idea that came to mind was the memory of the Milgram Experiment conducted by Stanley Milgram, psychologist at Yale University. Milgram was interested in understanding why so many people could follow Hitler as a leader and commit unbelievable atrocities toward another human being. It was an experiment in obedience and compliance. The participants were unwittingly part of the experiment and lied to about the intent of the study. Many other researchers questioned the ethics of the study because of the psychological harm that came to the participants. I won’t go into further detail about the study, but I will tell you why it reminded me of Milgram’s work. The study found people were less likely to inflict pain upon a person they were near and could see. So, proxemics, space between people
as they interact, affected how someone would behave. The further apart the participant and the fake participant, the more likely the participant would continue to increase the pain levels inflicted upon fake participant when told to by an authority figure.

Of course, as students fill out end of the course evaluations forms, an authority figure is not standing over them, intimidating them to complete it in any certain manner. However, in an online environment in which the student never or weakly made a personal connection with the course, other classmates, or the instructor, it could be easier to harshly criticize the course. There is no risk in damaging a relationship because the student did not make a personal investment. Rhea, Rovai, Ponton, Derrick, and Davis make the point that online students may not make the connection or care that their destructive criticism has the potential to damage the instructor, the viability of the course, and the institution.

Over the last six years of teaching, I have had an occasional case where a student was not so nice in class, but tolerable. However, in email correspondence, their tone was very rude, disdainful and condescending. I am sure they would not speak to me in person that way, but somehow they feel they can hide behind the technology. For me, this study emphasizes the importance creating a personal connection with my students in any learning environment and not just so I can receive outstanding evaluation marks. If a student feels more connected to an instructor and to his/her peers, he/she is more likely to be committed to the institution and more likely persist with their academic program. And if a student is more connected and committed, he/she will provide feedback that is constructive and can help in the survival of the institution, the course, and the instructor.

6) Facilitating online discussions effectively


Alfred Rovai, the author of this article, proposes asynchronous online courses must be designed to facilitate and to engage students in productive discussions. The author suggests the online design should contain discussion forums that foster a sense community. Rovai also covers techniques to motivate students and stresses the “instructor plays a crucial role in maintaining and sustaining students’ motivational levels.” The author also states it is important for students to interact with one another. The instructor should have a presence, but should not dominate the discussion forums. This article analyzes potential obstacles to effective online discussions. They include a few students dominating the discussion forums, frequent posts irrelevant to course content, too many messages to read, even bullying. He suggests strategies to overcome specific obstacles, when encountered in online classrooms. Rovai presents a conceptual model for effective online discussions. The components of design are: socio-emotional and task-oriented discussion forums, contextualized discussion topics, and a participation rubric (expectations for full credit postings). The components of facilitation are: social presence, student-student interactions, sense of community, cultural and gender communication patterns, and student status. The author notes the model supports a Social Constructivist theoretical perspective.
As I read this article, I made a comparison to our EDIT 5316 course. Does our course have all of the design and facilitation components of Rovai’s model and what he suggests create effective online discussions? The answer is yes. The “Lounge” provides an opportunity for students to post ideas and thoughts which help create a sense of community. The “I have a question” gives a student the opportunity to post a question to the professor in an open forum, allowing all students access to information clarified by the professor. Students hesitant to ask questions openly have access to private email correspondence between teacher-student within the BlackBoard system. The professor provides a social presence in the form of emails to keep the class on course and occasionally posts to the Task Oriented Content Forums to stimulate ideas and discussion.

The “Student Introductions” forum helped each student get acquainted with each other. Over the course of the semester, it has been helpful to refer back to those introductions to refresh my mental image of a particular student as I respond to their posts. I think back to my own introduction and wish I had presented less factual information about myself and had been more personable. This is the first online course I have taken, so I did not know anyone and was not comfortable being too open. As I continue in the EDIT program (and if offered the opportunity in other courses), I think I will begin to share more information about myself (Social Penetration Theory – layers).

Rovai’s conceptual model’s ultimate goal is for “effective construction of knowledge.” Our online course contains the opportunity for reflection through integrated activities (Cave) and the opportunity to apply what we have learned through case studies (Jungle), but Rovai’s model is lacking in these two areas. I would recommend, especially since Rovai’s model is built from a constructivist perspective, to add reflection and applied components to the design of the model. Through cave and jungle activities, students are able to internalize information and provide more thoughtful postings demonstrating an enhanced understanding of the material when returning to the online discussion forums.

7) Sense of community, perceived cognitive learning and persistence in asynchronous learning networks.


This study analyzes and proposes a relationship, but not causal, between cognitive learning and a sense of community in an online learning environment. Three hundred and fourteen participants from education and leadership classes, spanning 26 online courses, volunteered for the study. The instruments used to gather data for the study were the Classroom Community Scale (by Rovai) and a Self-Report of Perceived Cognitive Learning by Richmond, Gorham, and McCroskey. The Classroom Community Scale is a self-reporting scale specifically designed for a classroom situation, unlike the Dean Scale.
which has been criticized for being too general and not of value because it is not geared to a specific context or setting. The Self-Report of Perceived Cognitive Learning asked participants just one question, “how much did you learn in this class?” This single item was scaled from 0-9. Rovai explains the validity of the self-report of perceived learning. The study reveals a direct positive relationship between sense of community and perceived cognitive learning. The author suggests higher levels of sense of community and perceived learning can help create greater academic program satisfaction which in turn can help reduce dropout rates. Rovai asserts that if all of these factors influence one another that sense of community should be considered a part of the foundation in the design of online programs.

Using qualitative and quantitative measures to evaluate learning outcomes:

I come from the school of thought of equating grades with learning, and this is not always the case. I think this measure continues to be the most prevalent in education because it has been so entrenched in our institutions, design and pedagogy. We feel comfortable when we can quantify learning outcomes. In this article, Rovai explains problems encountered when equating grades with cognitive learning. A few of the problems Rovai mentions when using final course grades as a measure are participation, absences, and late work are not part of cognitive learning. Also, students may have knowledge of the course content previous to taking the class. However, I think using an instrument that combines final course grades, pre-tests, post-tests, and perceived cognitive learning data could provide both qualitative and quantitative information to demonstrate if learning has occurred.

A case for adding Kenneth Burke’s Identification construct:

Kenneth Burke taught for 15 years and lectured at places such as Harvard and Princeton, and did not have a college degree. He was a critic, scholar, and symbolic theorist. He is also known as the father of Dramatism Theory. Burke stated in his theory that life IS a drama and we are the actors that play out scenes. In the textbook A First Look at Communication Theory, the theory of dramatism states “language is a strategic, motivated response to a specific situation.” Identification is one of the significant constructs of Burke’s theory. This concept is generally utilized in rhetoric. To be an effective rhetorician, one must identify with his/her audience by finding common ground, while using similarities to establish a connection and a rapport with the audience. I think incorporating the concept identification into an online environment would be beneficial to increasing students’ sense of community. An instructor who shares personal examples/stories or reinforces and supports student comments in an online environment is practicing “identification” and creating a bond with his/her students. The construct of Identification is grounded in theory and would enhance the concept of sense of community. Sense of community could be strongly considered a foundation of design and pedagogy in online learning environments.
8) Feelings of alienation and community among higher education students in a virtual classroom


This study analyzes the factors in low retention rates in distance education programs. The author cites a study from 2000 that reported online programs have less than a 60% retention rate. How to retain students in online learning environments is the impetus for his study. Two factors for “low persistence” rates are identified as alienation and low sense of community. The alienation construct includes three variables: social isolation, powerlessness, and normlessness. The sense of community construct includes two variables: social community and learning community. Canonical Correlation Analysis is utilized to compare the two constructs: alienation and sense of community and to determine how one affects the other. How alienation and sense of community may differ in gender and ethnicity are examined as well. One hundred and seventeen graduate level students participated in the study (71 Caucasian, 44 African-American, 2 Hispanic – Hispanic data was dropped). These students were enrolled in a research methods course, and the course content was delivered via BlackBoard. The instrument utilized was the Dean Alienation Scale (self-report instrument) containing 24 statements with scaled responses (Likert scale). Many explanations are given why a student may feel or become alienated such as “lack of integration into the institutional life.” Students may not be prepared academically for the level of difficulty, lack of support from family, friends, and employers, and faculty may not have the necessary skills or training to teach in an online environment. Sense of community is described as belonging and being connected to other human beings. This desire to belong and to be a part of something is a basic human need. The results of the study revealed an inverse correlation between sense of community and alienation.

The author suggests that when a student feels alienated, he/she will spend his/her time searching for a social connection rather than spending time learning. If social needs cannot be found, the student will retreat, dropout, or find that social connection at another institution. In the case online learning, the student will search for another “educational delivery medium to satisfy their basic needs.”

This study was voluntary. I am curious to know why those who did not participate chose not to. Also, I would like to know the ethnicity of those who chose not to participate. Not participating in a study is an indication of alienation or a lack of connection to the communal good. Thus, I hypothesize if participation had been mandatory, the inverse correlation between alienation and sense of community would have been even significantly greater.

In my USTD course, which is not online, I assign the students a cultural event paper. They must attend a school or San Angelo Civic play, a San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts event,
on-campus symposium, etc. The students generally are not excited about the assignment; however, in their response papers, most students indicate they were glad they had to attend a cultural event. In addition, the majority of students said they had a desire to get more involved with the arts and the community. This assignment sparked something in them. While reading this study, it dawned on me I was trying to help the students integrate and feel connected to the community and to the university.

I think the implications and results of this study can easily be applied to on-campus programs as well in assessing low retention rates. Angelo State University, the university where I teach, has difficulty retaining freshmen and sophomores. In 2008, the retention rate was approximately 55%. A University Studies program that was already in place which incorporated methods to work to retain students shifted focus to emphasize retaining students. I agree students desire a connection to be part of something and feel a sense of belonging and community is linked to academic success and motivation. As a teacher, it is important for me to recognize when a student is displaying behaviors of alienation and provide an intervention that will help reduce feelings of alienation.

9) Cultural diversity in online learning: A study of the perceived effects of dissonance in levels of individualism/collectivism and tolerance of ambiguity.


This study examines how and if cultural differences affect an online classroom environment. Student’s perceptions of their instructor’s cultural awareness is evaluated. The theoretical framework used is a definition of culture by Hofstede that analyzes the value system and dimensions (individualism versus collectivism, ambiguity tolerant or intolerant) of a culture. (Ambiguity Tolerant = Does not consider knowledge of cultural background important/Ambiguity Intolerant=Cultural background is important). The authors postulate collectivist/ambiguity intolerant learners will feel their instructors are less culturally aware than their individualist and ambiguity tolerant peers in an online learning environment. The instrument used was a 3-part electronic survey administered to both students and instructors. One part of the survey asked demographic questions, the second part asked questions about culture and perception, and the third part incorporated the Hofstede Value Survey. An email was sent to 336 instructors with the URL to take the survey. Also, a note was included in the email requesting the survey be forwarded to the instructors’ students. ONLY 25 instructors and 40 students responded. Instructors and learners were classified into one of four categories: 1) Ambiguity Tolerant/Individualist, 2) Ambiguity Intolerant/Individualist, 3) Ambiguity Tolerant/Collectivist, 4) Ambiguity Intolerant/Collectivist

My initial interest for selecting this article was that the titled contained the word “dissonance.” I studied Leon Festinger’s Cognitive Dissonance Theory while a graduate
student. This article did not deal with dissonance in the way I had expected. Given all the categories and subcategories, I question the validity of the sample size, only forty student responses. This seems a small number of responses for generalizing amongst five cultures using two dualistic dimensions.

I find the results of this study confusing as well. The authors categorize Americans, Canadians and British into an individualistic/ambiguity tolerant Cultural Dimension. It is not important to know about cultural differences experienced (in an online course), and citizens from these countries are more likely to participate in online discussions in this dimension. Students from India and China were categorized as collectivist/ambiguity tolerant. The Collectivist quadrant expressed statements such as: 1) Feel cultural background is not being considered by their instructors, 2) Feel their instructors are not aware of cultural differences in the classroom. This made sense to me, but what didn’t make sense was categorizing students from China and India as ambiguity tolerant. These students feel cultural background is not important in an online setting. I expected people from Eastern cultures to find this important. It may mean Asian foreign students are more assertive and confident individuals. Or maybe the online classroom masks culture cues that may become important in a traditional classroom setting.

More responses would have made this study more effective. And if the study had discerned whether or not a student had been acculturated into the United States’ individualistic society, the results would have been different. For example, an Indian born and raised in the United States would have characteristics more similar to the individualistic/ambiguity tolerant dimension. Even though I found the study suspect, it made me think about the importance of being mindful and respectful of other cultures within an online environment as well as in my classroom. Acknowledging diverse cultures and diverse perspectives is important to creating a sense of community in any setting.

10) Distinguishing sense of community and motivation characteristics between online and traditional college students.


Through Discriminant analysis, the article examines two variables: intrinsic motivation and sense of community in both online courses and courses taught in a traditional classroom setting. The authors discuss the importance of these two variables in academic success. The researchers seek to classify students into categories in the different learning environments. Three hundred and twenty students from three accredited universities in Virginia volunteered for this study, 165 enrolled in twelve face-to-face courses and 155 enrolled in twelve online courses. Eighty-five percent of the participants were female; fifteen percent male. The study was conducted during the last three weeks of the semester. The participants enrolled in traditional face-to-face courses
were given a survey. Online students received the survey via Blackboard. Two
instruments were utilized to gather data, both self-reporting measures: the Classroom
and School Community Inventory (CSCI) to measure sense of community and a 28 item
Academic Motivation Scale-College (AMS-C 28) to measure motivation (intrinsic,
extrinsic, amotivation). The results revealed the most significant predictor in
“discriminating between online and traditional students” was stronger intrinsic
motivation in the online group.

The authors, Wighting and Rovai, continue and refer to studies that validate their results
as well as other studies that point to increased cognitive learning in online
environments. In addition, the authors point to a body of research that concludes there
is no difference. One study found intrinsic motivation is greater in students enrolled in
traditional face-to-face courses, contradicting Wighting and Rovai’s work. The article
referred to was “An Interesting Profile-University Students who Take Distance Education
Courses Show Weaker Motivation Than On-Campus Students” published in the Online Journal of
Distance Education. Curious to learn about the other side of the coin, I located and read
this article. To compare the results of this study with the results of Wighting and Rovai’s
work would be like comparing apples to oranges, an invalid analogy. First on my radar for
the opposing study was the sample of participants. The sample size was 174 students
from a Canadian University. So, the sample size was smaller and from a different culture.
Next motivational qualities through a factor analysis for this study were determined.
These factors were degree seeking, information seeking, participating (attaining goals),
and job enhancing. The Motivational Model tested for items such as Escape a Situation,
Fulfill Obligations, Personal Fulfillment, Gain Cultural Knowledge, Personal Gain through
a 55 item questionnaire. The motivation level of a student was basically determined by
WHY he/she sought a degree online. For instance, if I sought a DE degree because my job
required it, I am less motivated. The motivation for a person’s long term actions can be
different than WHAT motivates him/her in the classroom setting. The first study reflects
what motivates a person and to what extent. The second study reflects why a person
would select an online degree program rather than an on-campus program. These
studies are very different. The second study is hasty to generalize and lacks evidence to
conclude students enrolled in online distance education programs are less motivated
than students enrolled in on-campus programs.

So, I wonder why the first article referred to the second article. Perhaps, the title of the
second article is misleading making the reader assume similar attributes of motivation
were compared. However, once the two studies are actually compared, the reader
will find they are very different. This makes me question how often one study cites
another study in support of or contrary to the researcher’s hypothesis when the cited
work is clearly different.

OTHER SOURCES/READ OR REFERENCED


