Social presence and emotional engagement in online learning

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Social presence is the degree to which a learner feels personally connected with other students and/or teachers (Vu, Fredrickson and Moore, 2017).

Emotional engagement refers to how learners feel about the learning experience, e.g. interested in the course content, feel safe to ask questions (Flores and Sprake, 2013).

Both social presence and emotional engagement are key elements to create a successful online learning environment.

These are some ideas that you can try in your online course.

Read more about this topic:
https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/online-education/emotions-in-online-teaching-a-powerful-tool-for-helping-online-students-engage-persist-and-succeed/

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Introductions

Introduce yourself and then invite students to introduce themselves. Use text, audio or video for your introduction. Any information you would like to know about your students, provide it about yourself first. For example, tell them where you are located before asking them where they are based. Creating a survey with MSForms and posting the link in Canvas is an easy way of collecting students' responses.

Syllabus/Course description quiz

Help students get ready for the course by setting up a syllabus/course description quiz where they revise the information in those introductory documents. Add also two or three questions to determine their interests, expectations or previous knowledge of the subject (*are you already familiar with any of the topics mentioned in the course description*?, *which topic looks most interesting to you*?, *why have you chosen this elective*?, *what do you hope to learn in this course*?).

Students' experiences with online learning

Now that, like you, students have gained some experience with online learning, ask them about what has worked for them, what challenges they have found, what strategies they feel they have to use when learning online compared to learning on campus, whether there are things that work better online than face-to-face for them. They might provide useful information to plan and deliver your teaching.

Question/Thought of the day

Begin online sessions with a question unrelated to the course content or with a question about the topic you will be discussing. If the question is related to the course content, choose one that can be answered relatively quickly and provide it in advance so that students join the session with their answers ready. The purpose is to get everyone engaged at the very beginning of the session.

Quick conversations

Give students two or three questions to ask each other in small groups in the breakout rooms (5 minutes is enough). Another option is the "common ground" activity, where students try to find out a few things they have in common. In the case of very large groups, you can repeat the same activity during two or three weeks so that students get to know more people.

Chat

Use the Chat for quick questions to see how students are feeling (e.g. in general or about a particular activity/topic/assignment). They can use emojis to reply quickly; otherwise, you can give a list of one-word options. If students prefer anonymity, share the link to an anonymous survey in the Chat or use the polling feature in Zoom/Teams.

Increase communication

Provide plenty of opportunities for students to ask questions and check regularly how they are doing and progressing in the course. Apart from the usual consultation hours, it may be useful to make more use of the Announcements in Canvas or to set up a weekly arrangement like a Feedback Friday to get feedback from students on how the week went or to collect questions from them.

Clarify expectations in advance

Explain to students how the online teaching/learning will be organized (e.g. what parts of the course will take place asynchronously and which ones synchronously), what they should expect during live online sessions (e.g. cameras on?, group work in breakout rooms?, cold calling?, students' presentations?), or whether live sessions will be recorded.

References:

Flores, K. and Sprake, T. (2013) Strategies for engaging the adult learner, in *Innovation in teaching adults. Proven practices in higher education*, edited by K. D. Kirstein et al., CreateSpace, https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED557578.pdf

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