



## Creating Student Engagement With Human Connection

Making meaningful learning experiences is the goal of educators, both online and off. But the convenience of the online classroom carries its own unique benefits and challenges in creating a direct connection between the student and instructor. Feelings of isolation have been noted by online students, causing frustration, leading to higher attrition rates.

Croft, Dalton and Grant (2010) point out feelings of isolation can be conquered by building a sense of community. Luckily, there are many tools available, right at the educator's fingertips.

One tool in the educator's box is the discussion board. A well run, interactive discussion board is the simplest way for the instructor to:

1. **Establish a lifeline to the student**
2. **Enhance critical thinking skills**
3. **Create a meaningful form of online assessment**

Faculty members are not immune to the effects of isolation and disconnection happening in the online environment. Instructor participation is the key to the success of the student, as well as the success of the course.

It is time to discover strategies to transform the static bulletin board into a lively, action-packed learning environment. Inside are tips and tricks to make the important connections between you and your student, the student and the student, and the student and the coursework.

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community..."*

*- Croft, Dalton & Grant  
(2010)*

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## The Student-Professor Connection

### An interview with Dr. Kimberly Watson, Ed.D

In September, 2013, we interviewed Dr. Kim Watson about her strategy for increasing student engagement in regards to her BUS 312 class using the *The Student-Professor Connection*. After attending a Share & Learn presented by the Distance Education Department, Dr. Watson implemented the one-on-one chat feature with her students.

**Tell me a little about the class you are using this feature in currently?** I am using the "Student-Professor Connection" in my BUS 312 course. There were a total of 27 HCA and BSMI Students in this course. I first utilized this communication method in Spring 2013. I plan to use this method again in Fall 2013.

**Why did you feel this one-on-one discussion was important?** I was looking for a method to "connect" more fully with my students. With an 8-week course, time flies by fast so I need to "connect" with them from Day 1. For years in the HCA Program, we have been using a weekly Journal method to touch base with our students on content, how the course was going, any concerns about the course or D2L, essentially anything students wanted to share about the

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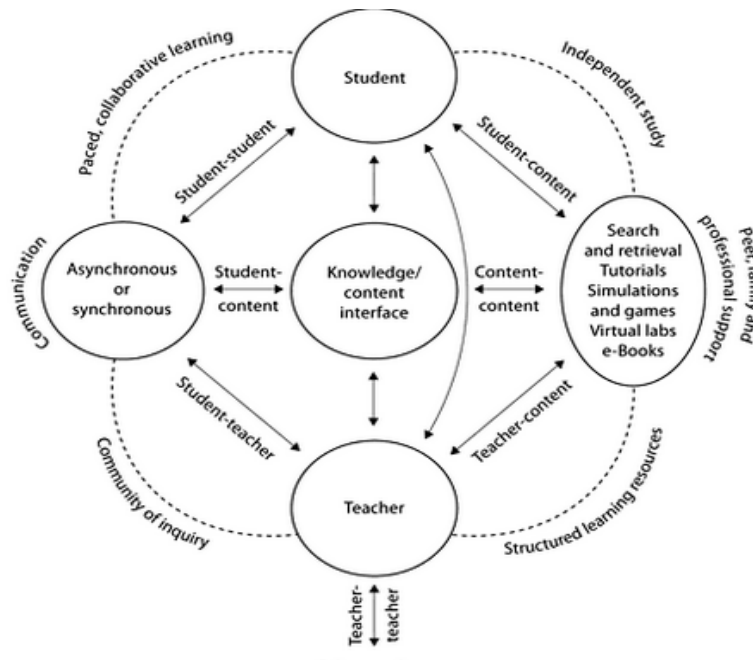
# The Rules of Engagement

Online student engagement has been a hot topic in the past several years. Capturing the student's attention, even in a land-based classroom is a task. Coursework that has relevance in real-life contexts, increases student engagement by equipping them with practical and useful critical thinking skills.

Harrington, Oliver and Reeves (2003) made a case for the benefits of authentic learning activities.

Authentic learning activities are best described as complex critical thinking studies. Some of the criteria for an activity to be considered authentic learning are:

- Must have real world relevance
- Ill-defined so students need to ask questions and sub-questions to arrive at a conclusion.
- Complex questions answered over a period of time.
- Need for exploring a variety of resources.
- Need for collaboration
- Opportunity to reflect
- Allow for competing solutions
- Seamless integration with assessments
- Creates an end-product, not a part of a larger one.



Map of the Student/Instructor Dynamic (Anderson & Elloumi, 2009)

## Connection (continued from page 1)

external factors that may have influenced their learning experience that week. This connection provides me with an on-going pulse of how my students are doing in the course. I can answer their content questions immediately and encourage each student to succeed during their educational journey.

**Do you give the students a prompt? If so, what kinds of questions/prompts do you ask?** No, the students share a variety of insights regarding their learning experience, from the course content to current work HR issues to personal reflections about their weekly learning experience.

**Do you think that this activity is adding value to the course?** Yes, based on their feedback, they have commented that they sense the value of the "Student-Professor Connection" and enjoy that I am touching base with them on an one-on-one basis.

**Do you like this set up better than journal entries?** Yes, the format of the "Student-Professor Connection" is more of an ongoing communication blog between the Professor and the student. As the journal was written in a Microsoft WORD document and placed in a drop box, it felt more like one more assignment. While I do assign a 10 point value to the activity, the S-P Connection is just that, a connection... an engaged one-on-one communication.. As the entire thread of communication is seen within that one-on-one confidential blog, as an educator, I can see the development of a student's insights about the subject matter as well as their online learning experience from the beginning to the end of the course.

**What are the student's reactions to this activity?** The students seem to really like the opportunity to engage with the professor and to receive detailed individual, confidential responses directly from the professor in a timely manner.

Sample of BUS 312 specific Student-Professor Connection Student Comments:

"The most beneficial aspects of this course were the discussion and the one on one student-professor contact. The student-professor contact is great when a student is truly concerned about a situation".

"Thanks again for taking the time to get to know me and read my thoughts through this student-professor connection. I think every professor should have one of these in order to know how students are feeling about the class".

**Do you feel this helps you feel more connected to the students?** In teaching online, I do not have the benefit of face-to-face interactions. However, with this method of communication, both the students and myself benefit from our active dialogue. I save "grading" this particular item until the very end of the module. It is a fun, culminating activity for that particular module. It is gratifying to know that my Student-Professor interactions are truly making a difference.



## 3B's of Effective Participation in the Discussion Forum

Effective instructor participation in the asynchronous discussion forum is easy to achieve and time-effective. While students can post to each other, it takes the input of the instructor to transform a static bulletin board into a conversation.

### Be realistic

When making a decision between synchronous and asynchronous discussions, keep in mind your schedule, as well as the schedules of your students. Since most synchronous discussions can be stored for viewing at a later date, these may be a good choice for an optional or bonus-with-attendance activity. The asynchronous discussion fleshes out a topic over time, giving the student cause to pause and reflect, and the instructor time to redirect errant responses.

### Be engaged

The tone you set is impactful. When students see instructors that are engaged, they want to join in the fun. Draw them in and hold on tight. Effective student outcomes in higher education are positively influenced by student-led activities with the instructor as the guiding force. Check in often to answer student questions; no one likes to be left hanging.

### Be yourself

Throw yourself out there. Do not be afraid. You have the knowledge and credentials to instruct the material. Share this freely by probative questions to student posts and responses along with praise for a job well done..

### Coming up in February:

- Shifting content from the classroom online
- An Interview with Cindy Miller, on using D2L for the first time
- What makes an effective online instructor

## Engagement Mash-Up

## Discussion Board Activities

Traditionally, the discussion board is the simplest form of communication online between students and instructors. A well designed discussion board can make learning fun and meaningful for the student and assessable for the instructor. Here are a few discussion designs that work well:

### Things

An icebreaker where the instructor **and** students find an object or digital image that represents who they are or why they are taking/teaching the course. Explain why the object was chosen and post a picture or a link to the image. The instructor then assembles the images into a course montage and posts it on the course website.

### Ask & Answer

Everybody has questions about something. And somebody has the answers to those questions. In this format, the student will do both: ask & answer.

**Ask:** Post a question about something not understood on the week's topic. In the subject heading state what it is about (i.e.: Validity). In the message box ask the question.

**Answer:** Pick a question from 2 classmates and give it your best shot in your own words.

### I Didn't Know That!

Students post something new they learned that week, either from another student, from the text, or from class discussions. Then, students will express how they will use the new information or skill. Responding students will explain how this new information will make a difference to them perform a task or perceive a concept.

### Show & Tell

At the end of a big project, but before it is turned in, have students post the title of their project in the subject line, with a brief reflection of their experience constructing the project. Instruct the student to copy & paste the conclusion of the project. Students will respond with their reflection on the project, giving at least one positive comment (because we all do something well) and one suggestion to the student for strengthening the conclusion (because we are not perfect).



## ANDROID APPS TO SUPPORT BLOOM'S REVISED TAXONOMY ASSEMBLED BY KATHY SCHRACK



<http://www.schrockguide.net/bloomin-apps.html>

## The Back Story

Education has been evolving away from the traditional classroom, into blended or totally online learning experiences. But what has not changed is the central theme of the student-led learning. Ownership of learning is created by relevancy through engagement. Through thoughtful planning, students can be given a dynamic learning experience.

### A picture says a thousand words...

Plotting the course for that dynamic experience lies in choosing the right tools. Consider applying any of the widely available and user friendly Web 2.0 tools to your discussion activities to keep them interested and connected. Many are free or low cost. One activity would be to have students create an account and profile on LinkedIn to start building a positive, professional online presence.

### It's called a "discussion board" for a reason

Remember to add a heaping serving of **YOU**. While adult education is best when student-led, there needs to be a facilitator to keep it all on track. This is your opportunity to let who you are shine through. In the long run, your knowledge and expertise will have a positive impact on your student's success throughout the course.

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You are the reason we are here. Feel free to stop by or give us a call for information and help in adding more technology to your land-based, hybrid, or online courses.

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