Encyclopedia of Distance Learning
Second Edition

Patricia Rogers
Bemidji State, USA

Gary Berg
Chapman University, USA

Judith Boettcher
Designing for Learning, USA

Carole Howard
Touro University International, USA

Lorraine Justice
Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong

Karen Schenk
University of Redlands, USA & North Carolina State University, USA

Volume III
Ins–Ret

Instructional Immediacy Online

Sherri Melrose
Athabasca University, Canada

Educators in both traditional and online learning events have consistently recognized a link between teachers who demonstrate warm, friendly behaviors and the creation of welcoming interactive learning environments. One critical instructional strategy that facilitates a sense of community and fosters a learning climate rich in social presence is immediacy. While teachers in face-to-face classrooms often demonstrate immediacy non-verbally through facial expressions and body language, teachers in online learning environments may be required to project immediacy exclusively through written messages.

THE CONSTRUCT OF IMMEDIACY

Immediacy is demonstrated through behaviors that express an emotional attachment or closeness to another person. The construct was originally developed by social psychologist Albert Mehrabian in the 1960s (Mehrabian, 1967; 1971; Wiener and Mehrabian, 1968). Immediacy is founded on the premise that individuals are drawn toward persons and things they like, evaluate highly and prefer. As an expression of affect, immediacy includes both verbal and non verbal behavioral cues. A "we" or "our" statement communicates immediacy while a "you" or "your" statement does not. Subtle variations in language indicate different degrees of separation or non-identity of speakers from the object of their communication.

IMMEDIACY IN EDUCATION

Adapting the construct of immediacy from communication theory to applications in higher education classrooms, Andersen (1979) introduced the idea of nonverbal instructional immediacy to college teaching. Andersen explained that immediacy is a nonverbal manifestation of high affect and is demonstrated through maintaining eye contact, leaning closer, touching, smiling, maintaining a relaxed body posture, and attending to voice inflection. Later, as summarized in Table 1, Gorham (1988) identified specific verbal expressions of instructional immediacy. Also, Christophel (1990) and Christophel and Gorham (1995) established that links exist among instructional immediacy, student motivation and affective learning.

Demonstrating instructional immediacy in online classroom environments is not straightforward. However, despite limited or absent non verbal visual cues, virtual teachers can still communicate likeability and a willingness to become affectively close to their students. While research studies in online learning may offer only moderate correlations between immediacy and cognitive learning, the experience of liking and feeling close to the instructor has been linked to positive effects in the classroom (Hess & Smythe, 2001). Correlations between immediacy and affective learning have been established (Baker, 2004). And, significant correlations between perceptions of the instructor's presence with both affective learning and with student learning satisfaction have also been established (Russo & Benson, 2005). These outcomes are consistent with findings on teacher immediacy literature in traditional classrooms and they underscore the role of the teacher in establishing an engaging climate in any learning environment. Translating verbally immediate behaviors from face to face classrooms to online learning events includes responding promptly and adapting Gorham's (1988) original suggestions (Arbaugh, 2001; Baker, 2004; Hutchins, 2003).

Table 1. Verbal expressions of instructional immediacy (Gorham, 1988)

- Use personal examples
- Engage in humor
- Ask questions
- Initiate conversations with students
- Address students by name
- Praise student work
- Encourage student expression of opinions

IMMEDIACY AND SOCIAL PRESENCE

Instructional immediacy impacts social presence, which in turn, can strengthen the sense of community within learning experiences. Social psychologists Short, Williams and Christie (1976) defined social presence as the degree of salience within interpersonal relationships in mediated communication. Salience implies feelings of presence, engagement, affection, inclusion, and involvement. In essence, an individual who demonstrates social presence in an online environment is one who is perceived by others as a "real person." Table 2 summarizes the bi-polar scales that Short and colleagues developed to measure social presence. A higher level of social presence online suggests that an individual consistently demonstrates attributes that are more sociable, more personal, more sensitive, and warmer.

According to Gunawardena (1995), immediacy increases social presence and thus enhances the degree to which a person is perceived as 'real'. Rourke, Anderson, Garrison, and Archer (2001) defined social presence as the ability of learners to project themselves socially and affectively into a community of inquiry. Social presence has been found to be related to students' perceived learning and satisfaction (Gunawardena and Zittte, 1997; Richardson and Swan, 2003), persistence with their courses (Rovai, 2002), more complex discussion postings (Polhemus, Shih and Swan, 2001) and a significant factor in improving instructional effectiveness (Tu, 2002).

Social presence, with its underpinnings of immediacy, is considered a key element in establishing strong communities of inquiring and connected learners. In learning events where social presence is absent, participants may not feel comfortable and safe enough to express disagreement, share viewpoints, explore differences or even to accept support from their peers and teachers (Anderson, 2004; Garrison, Anderson, & Archer,2000).

DEMONSTRATING IMMEDIACY ONLINE

Exploring online students' perceptions of immediacy, Melrose and Bergeron (2006) identified how learners value instructional behaviors that model engaging and personal ways of connecting; that maintain collegial relationships; and that honor individual learning accomplishments. Table 3 summarizes specific strate-

Table 2. Measuring social presence online (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976)

• Sociable - unsociable
• Personal - impersonal
• Sensitive - insensitive
• Warm - cold

gies from this study that demonstrate instructional immediacy online.

CONCLUSION

Instructional immediacy online is the extent to which teachers are able to project an affect of warmth and likeability within their written communication. Instructors who demonstrate immediate behaviors such as those identified by Melrose and Bergeron (2006) can be expected to engage students individually and to strengthen social presence within learning communities. Understanding ways to translate traditional non verbal expressions of friendliness to online classrooms and continuing to seek out new approaches that demonstrate immediacy online is both a challenge and an opportunity for distance educators.

REFERENCES

Andersen, J. F. (1979). Teacher immediacy as a predictor of teaching effectiveness. *Communication Yearbook, 3*, 543-559.

Anderson, T. (2004). Teaching in an online learning context. In T. Anderson & F. Elloumi (Eds.) *Theory and practice of online learning* (p. 273-294). Athabasca, AB.: Athabasca University Press. Retrieved March 20 27, 2008 from: http://cde.athabascau.ca/online_book/

Arbaugh, J. B. (2001). How instructor immediacy behaviors affect student satisfaction and learning in Web-based courses. *Business Communication Quarterly 64*(4), 42-54.

Table 3. Demonstrating instructional immediacy online (Melrose & Bergeron, 2006)

- Respond promptly
- Post self-introductions that include pictures & appropriate personal/professional information
- Create a document which includes biographical information about all members of the class
- Initiate private e-mails to express personal interest
- Include affective learning elements such as poems, metaphors and tasteful humor in forum postings to strengthen social presence.
- Establish a place for social conversation
- Ensure that social conversation does not dominate or distract from learning
- Type out individuals' names
- Choose words with gentle connotations
- Respond empathically to students' expressions of their individual needs

Baker, J. D. (2004). An investigation of relationships among instructor immediacy and affective and cognitive learning in the online classroom. *Internet and Higher Education 7*, 1-13.

Christophel, D. M. (1990). The relationship among teacher immediacy behaviors, student motivation, and learning. *Communication Education 39*(4), 323-340.

Christophel, D. M., & Gorham, J. (1995). A test-retest analysis of student motivation, teacher immediacy, and perceived sources of motivation and demotivation in college classes. *Communication Education 44*, 292-306.

Garrison, R., Anderson, T., & Archer, W. (2000). Critical Inquiry in a Text-based Environment: Computer conferencing in higher education. *The Internet and Higher Education, 2*(2-3), 1-19.

Gorham, J. (1988). The relationship between verbal teacher immediacy behaviors and student learning. *Communication Education, 37*(1), 40-53.

Gunawardena, C. N. (1995). Social presence theory and implications for interaction and collaborative learning in computer conferences. *International Journal of Educational Telecommunications 1*, 147-166.

Gunawardena, C. N., & Zittte, F. J. (1997). Social presence as a predictor of satisfaction within a computer-mediated conferencing environment. *American Journal of Distance Education 13*(3), 8-26.

Hess, J. A., & Smythe, M. J. (2001). Is teacher immediacy actually related to student cognitive learning? *Communication Studies, 52*, 197-219.

Hutchins, H. M. (2003). Instructional Immediacy and the Seven Principles: Strategies for facilitating online courses. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration 6*(3). Retrieved March 20, 2008 from: http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/fall63/hutchins63.html

Mehrabian, A. (1967). Attitudes inferred from nonimmediacy of verbal communication. *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior, 6*, 294-295.

Mehrabian, A. (1971). *Silent messages*. Belmont, CA.: Wadsworth.

Melrose, S., & Bergeron, K. (2006). Online Healthcare Graduate Study Learners' Perceptions of Instructional Immediacy. *International Review of Research In Open and Distance Learning 7*(1). Retrieved March 20, 2008 from: http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/viewArticle/255/477

Polhemus, L., Shih, L. F., & Swan, K. (2001). *Virtual Interactivity: The representation of social presence in an online discussion*. Paper presented at the annual

I

meeting of the American Educational Research Association, April. Seattle, WA.

Richardson, J. C., & Swan, K. (2003). Examining social presence in online course in relation to students' perceived learning and satisfaction. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks 7*(1). Retrieved March 20, 2008 from: http://www.sloan-c.org/publications/jaln/v7n1/v7n1_richardson.asp

Rourke, L., Anderson, T., Garrison, D., & Archer, W. (2001). Assessing social presence in asynchronous text-based computer conferencing. *Journal of Distance Education 14*(2). Retrieved March 20, 2008 from: http://cade.athabascau.ca/vol14.2/rourke_et_al.html

Rovai, A. (2002). Building Sense of Community at a Distance. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning 3*(1). Retrieved March 20, 2008 from: http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/79/153

Russo, T., & Benson, S. (2005). Learning with invisible others: Perceptions of online presence and their relationship to cognitive and affective learning. *Educational Technology & Society 8*(1), 54-62. Retrieved March 20, 2008 from: http://www.ifets.info/journals/8_1/8.pdf

Short, J., Williams, E., & Christie, B. (1976). *The social psychology of telecommunications*. London: John Wiley & Sons.

Tu, C. H. (2002). The Measurement of social presence in an online learning environment. *International Journal on E-Learning, 1*(2), 34-45.

Wiener, M., & Mehrabian, A. (1968). *Language Within Language: Immediacy, a channel in verbal communication*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts.

Woods, R. H., & Baker, J. D. (2004). Interaction and immediacy in online learning. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning 5*(2). Retrieved March 20, 2008 from: http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/186/268

KEY TERMS

Affect: A psychological term referring to experiences of feelings and emotions. Non-verbally, affect is displayed through facial expression and body language. Verbally, affect can be communicated through word choices.

Community Of Inquiry: Garrison, Anderson and Archer's (2000) model of learning online proposes that meaningful learning occurs best when teachers and students form a cohesive community of inquiry. The community of inquiry is based on the interaction of three core components: cognitive presence, teaching presence, and social presence.

Immediacy: An affective expression of emotional attachment or closeness to another person that was originally developed by social psychologist Albert Mehrabian.

Salience: From the field of social psychology, the term implies feelings of presence, engagement, affection, inclusion and involvement.

Social Presence: From the field of social psychology, the term includes both the degree of salience within an interpersonal relationship and the degree to which another is perceived as a "real" person in mediated communication. It implies social and affective involvement.