

THEORETICAL, REVIEW & REFLECTION ARTICLES

Teacher Passion and Distance Education Theory

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Despite a significant body of research on post-secondary distance education, harmonious passion has not been explored in relation to teacher presence. Teacher presence within a community of inquiry has been identified as an important influence and predictor of student performance. As such, determining the degree of relationship between teacher passion and teacher presence could lead to significant improvement in distance education delivery. If future distance education research confirms a correlation between teacher passion, teacher presence, and aesthetics, online interactions between teachers and learners may need to be re-conceived.

In this essay, the theory of passion as outlined by Vallerand et al. (2003) is explored in correlation with post-secondary distance education research. The importance and neglect of such issues as emotions and immediacy in online teaching and learning are discussed; and a theory of online teacher passion is proposed. Lastly, aesthetic experience is identified as an understated but important attribute in the theory and research on distance education.

TEACHER PASSION

What is teacher passion and why is it important to both face-to-face and online teaching in post-secondary education? Zembylas (2007) explains what he called the myth of the passions in which passion or emotion is a passive state that requires harnessing by cognition and rationale. This myth parallels the separation of cognitive and affective domains in Bloom's Taxonomy, and the resulting neglect of the affective domain in pedagogy (Booker, 2008; Boyd, Dooley, & Felton, 2006; Garritz, 2010). In this light, the myth of the passions in pedagogy is a cultural phenomenon that neglects Aristotle's holistic view of passion. For Aristotle (2002), our modern notions of cognition and affect would be part of the same whole, reaching harmony in friendship (i.e. *philia*), specifically beautiful friendship which would re-

quire right action, a shared purpose, and the use of both cognitive and affective domains. As Hyland (2010) stated "there is a cognitive aspect of all emotions and an affective dimension of cognition" (p. 520).

In the past decade, researchers in psychology have focused attention on the construct of passion. Vallerand et al. (2003) posited a theory of passion based on a dualistic model of good and self-destructive passion. As Vallerand et al. proposed, psychological understanding of passion can be understood in a construct of harmonious and obsessive behaviors. The work of Vallerand et al. is based on self-determination theory. The theory of self-determination suggests that there are three central psychological needs of human beings, which include competence, autonomy, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). As Deci and Ryan (2000) stated, research into self-determination "is the investigation of people's inherent growth tendencies and innate psychological needs that are the basis for their self-motivation and personality integration, as well as for the conditions that foster those positive processes" (p. 68). The Deci and Ryan theory is focused on motivation, specifically intrinsic motivation and self-regulation of extrinsically motivating factors.

Harmonious passion (HP) has also been linked to motivation and positive affect (Mageau & Valle-

rand, 2007). As Mageau and Vallerand stated “positive affect has been defined as a state of high energy and pleasurable engagement” (p. 313). In this regard, the study of HP could improve pedagogy by providing parameters for teacher training and improved interpersonal communication. In the construct of a face-to-face classroom, if a teacher is harmoniously passionate this would theoretically have a measurable positive effect on student satisfaction and student outcomes. However, Carbonneau, Vallerand, Fernet, and Guay (2008) empirically researched the role of passion in face-to-face teaching and found an important result. Carbonneau et al. in examining secondary and post-secondary teachers found that the self-perceived passionate teacher, whether harmonious or obsessive, can have a positive impact on student behavior. As Carbonneau et al. stated, “the finding that harmonious and obsessive passion have a similar and positive impact on others is interesting because the two types of passions are fueled by quite different kinds of processes” (p. 983). As Carbonneau et al. suggested, however, students may have difficulty in distinguishing harmonious from obsessive passion in teachers. More research is needed to explain this result. Nonetheless, theoretically many factors, including maturity and level of perceptivity of students in the study, could explain the way students perceive teacher passion. One such factor is the felt closeness of teacher and student; this relationship is discussed in the literature as “immediacy.”

The psychological construct of immediacy has been defined as a felt interpersonal closeness through both verbal and non-verbal communication (Anderson, 1979; Gorham, 1988; Mehbabian, 1967). As Thweatt and McCroskey (1996) stated “immediate behaviors may actually decrease the physical distance, or they may decrease the psychological distance” (p. 198). Immediate behaviors in face-to-face settings include smiles, physical proximity, and other verbal cues indicating a physical and psychological interpersonal closeness (Thweatt & McCroskey, 1996). In this frame of reference, immediacy can produce interpersonal connection, a feeling of closeness between participants that may seem like friendship (Anderson, 1979). In terms of teacher passion, such immediacy may affect participant perceptions, which could explain the surprising findings of the Carbonneau et al (2008) study. In terms of distance education, further exploration

of the constructs of teacher passion and immediacy may help improve online instruction.

DISTANCE EDUCATION THEORY

Distance learning theories such as transactional distance and community of inquiry have helped shape our perception of distance education. Specifically, Moore’s (1993) theory of transactional distance helped focus attention on the psychological aspects of pedagogy in distance education, specifically theorizing that as interaction increases perceived psychological distance decreases. Moore’s theory correlates with the aforementioned immediacy construct, the continued exploration of which may have a significant impact on distance education (C. Baker, 2010). In addition, Moore (1989) outlined three types of interaction in distance education, including teacher-student, student-student, and student-content, which Anderson (2003) further expanded to six types of interaction. Specifically, Anderson added teacher-teacher, teacher-content, and content-content types, which serve to highlight teacher specific behavior and content interaction.

Building on the work of Moore (1993) and others, Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) developed the community of inquiry (COI) model, which defined distance learning in terms of teacher presence, cognitive presence, and social presence. Although recent research has critiqued certain aspects of this dynamic, including the importance of the social presence construct (Annand, 2011; Rourke & Kanuka, 2009), the COI model remains the most complete and comprehensive process model on interaction in distance education. Concurrently, Holmberg (2003) re-conceived the need for empathy or personal connections between instructors and students in distance learning contexts. Holmberg’s theory correlates with the positive affect elements in teacher passion and the felt closeness of teacher immediacy.

One element of distance education that has been shown to be a key component to successful learning outcomes is teacher presence, which is a student-centered approach to learning (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001; Fish & Wickersham, 2009; Garrison & Cleveland-Innis, 2005; Gorsky & Blau, 2009; Lear, Isernhagen, LaCost, & King, 2009; Pawan, Paulus, Yalcin, & Chang, 2003). However, time and space issues, as well as technology and the student-centered approach itself differ from tradi-

tional modes of teaching in face-to-face settings. As a result, the transition to online teaching may be a difficult one for many college professors. As Easton (2003) stated the absence of visual cues changes the teaching and learning dynamic, which further complicates the practice of immediacy in distance education. Other researchers have shown the need for more interaction between teachers and learners in distance learning environments (Sugar, Martindale, & Crawley, 2007). In sum, for teachers to be effective in distance education, a transformation of their pedagogy is required (Coppola, Hiltz, & Rotter, 2002; Young, 2006). As Meyer (2002) stated, one obvious significance of the advent of distance education is the refocusing of our attention on what it means to teach and learn, to improve pedagogy.

In an effort to improve post-secondary pedagogy, Chickering and Gamson (1987) outlined seven principles of good teaching in undergraduate education. Chickering and Ehrmann (1996) added to this thesis by stating that these principles should be applied to distance education. Some researchers have tried to make such an application. For example, Zhang and Walls (2006) applied the Chickering and Gamson model to online teacher self-perceptions. Surprisingly, the least endorsed principle in the Zhang and Walls study was the principle of encouraging cooperation amongst students, which is the very principle upon which Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) based their community of inquiry model. Given the aforementioned discussion on immediacy and the need for quality online interactions, the Zhang and Walls study leads one to conclude that online instructors may perceive their role as merely instructors, not as facilitators or mediators, both of which require a greater degree of emotional investment.

AFFECT OR EMOTIONS IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

One aspect of the community of inquiry model that is understated is the importance of affect or emotions in the teacher presence construct. The debate over the focus on cognitive rather than affective elements in teaching initiated in face-to-face pedagogy (Leat, 1993). However, early on distance education researcher and theorist Borje Holmberg (1983) postulated the need for what he termed “guided didactic conversation” in distance education. Such teaching, as Holmberg (2003) reformulated as empathy, requires the distance education teacher to form personal relationships with their students.

Such relationships imply immediacy, and may indicate the presence of teacher passion. However, Bloom’s Taxonomy, as previously stated, separates emotion from rationale, making such relationships appear difficult in practice.

Bloom’s Taxonomy is the accepted basis for instructional design and includes three domains: cognitive, affective, and psychomotor (Savickiene, 2010). As researchers have shown, the cognitive and psychomotor domains are often emphasized in pedagogy to the relative neglect of the affective domain (Buchanan & Hyde, 2008; Pierce & Oughton, 2007). In addition, the affective domain is largely one confined to practice in religious education and the caring professions, such as counseling and the health care fields (Buchanan and Hyde, 2008; Hall, 2008).

Recently researchers have begun to extensively explore emotional or affective elements in distance education instruction (Feng, Lazar, & Preece, 2004; Schaber, Wilcox, Whiteside, Marsch, & Brooks, 2010; Sitzman, 2010, Taylor, 2011). However, the literature does not show that researchers have explored the relationship between the teacher passion construct, as put forth by Carbonneau et al. (2008), and the teacher presence construct of Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000), or the uniting of the cognitive and affective domains into an aesthetic approach to online instruction. Nonetheless, the psychological construct of immediacy in distance education has received some attention from researchers (C. Baker, 2010; Kucuk, 2009; Melrose & Bergeron, 2006; Woods & Baker, 2004).

HARMONIOUSLY PASSIONATE DISTANCE EDUCATION TEACHER

What would a harmoniously passionate teacher look like in a distance learning classroom? For this thought project, let us use the construct of an asynchronous distance learning classroom, which is the most common format in distance education (Parsad, Lewis, & Tice, 2008). The student-centered approach offered by Holmberg (1983) requires real emotional connections between participants, or the presence of immediacy. In this regard, as Garrison (1994) stated, the teacher would demonstrate care and bestowal toward students. Within the community of inquiry model teacher presence would be sympathetic. However, Holmberg (2003) specifically used the word empathy to describe the kind of re-

relationships distance education teachers ought to have with their students. Various researchers from different disciplines have endeavored to define the difference between sympathy and empathy (Agosta, 2011; Clark, 2010; Darwell, 1998; Yegdich, 1999). Sympathy seems to fit more closely the nature of the relationship being devised in this essay. As Darwell (1998) stated, sympathy implies self-regard as well as regard for the object of sympathy, namely the other. This is not always the case with the concept of empathy (Darwell, 1998). This definition of sympathy fits well with our previous discussion of harmonious passion and the community of inquiry model. In this light, the health of the person sympathizing as well as the person cared for are equally important.

Moore's (1989) three types of interaction in distance education offers us an opportunity to understand how a harmoniously passionate teacher would interact in an asynchronous learning environment. As Moore (1993) stated in his transactional distance theory for psychological distance to decrease interaction must increase, a dynamic that mirrors the construct of immediacy as outlined by Thweatt & McCroskey (1996). The objects of sympathy for the members of the community of inquiry, according to Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000), are the other participants. A harmoniously passionate (HP) distance education teacher would be more receptive and responsive, meaning more timely and caring, to the questions, concerns, and comments of the community participants. In student-student interaction, the HP teacher as moderator would have positive affect, and hence positive comments and encouragement, facilitating more frequent and in-depth interaction among peers. In the student-content interaction, the HP teacher would be organized, providing diverse course content and be receptive to changing content when warranted. In threaded discussions, the HP teacher would be positive, timely, and sympathetic to the learning needs of individual students. In sum, the level of one's care for one's work under the HP model of teaching would consistently produce a more harmonious learning environment for distance education students, which may have the added effect of increasing learning outcomes.

AESTHETICS IN DISTANCE EDUCATION

Empirical research is needed to determine the

prevalence and qualities of teacher passion in post-secondary distance education. It is clear from what has been previously stated, however, that the affective or emotional part of pedagogy is often neglected. From the aforementioned, the following conclusion may be reached. Aesthetics, or an appreciation of beauty or beautiful interactions, is a missing element in pedagogy, and distance education in particular (Alexander, 1987; Baker, 2010; Dewey, 1934/1980; Garrison, 1994; Parrish, 2006). Distance education research has helped us refocus our attention on the idea that psychological distance may occur in education, but the appreciation of on-line interaction as potentially beautiful has not occurred. As Sachs, a recent translator of Aristotle, stated, "an action is right in the same way that a painting might get everything just right" (Aristotle, 2002, p. xxi). Sachs suggests the Greek word to kalon normally translated in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* as noble is better understood in the Greek as well in our time as beautiful. In this way, beautiful learning environments have logic and hence harmony, which may result in beautiful outcomes (i.e. teacher and student satisfaction, higher order thinking, and student achievement). To grasp the disconnect between modern notions of beauty and education, let us think about the following geometry example.

Think of two Euclidean right triangles with sides of the same length. In our reflection, we can clearly envision superimposing one triangle on the other. Once superimposed, the two right triangles would appear to be one. They would be in accord, perfectly match, or have harmony. One might even call such accord beautiful. If one of the two triangles were obtuse or acute, the two triangles would not be in accord. They would be discordant. Music theory, which commonly uses the terms accord and discord, also points toward aesthetic experience (Aigen, 2007). Intuitively we would call accordant music beautiful. The same holds for education. We may say a piece of music is beautiful in the same way we may say a learning environment is beautiful. We intuitively know the difference. The same holds for distance education, but the additional challenges presented by differences in space and time of the participants bring to the forefront the challenge for teaching and learning in distance education. In appreciating online interaction as potentially beautiful, we move from quick learning solutions to discussions

about invested relationships, something akin to friendships. However, modern conceptions of pedagogy are not formulated to view teachers as friends, or teaching and learning as friendships. This fundamental understanding of beauty in its broader sense could help us merge the cognitive with the affective in teaching and learning, and hence construct the parameters for building and sustaining a sense of community in distance learning environments (McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Rovai, 2001).

CONCLUSION

Whether the post-secondary online teacher mentors, facilitates, instructs, or all of the above, if such a teacher is to guide a community of inquiry, that is mediate a beautiful learning environment, he or she needs to have sympathy with their students, which implies the ability to emotional connect in the way suggested by Holmberg (2003). Though theoretically a distance education teacher could “act” like he or she has sympathy or “act” with immediacy, that is give others the sense that their actions are genuine, without being harmoniously passionate, such behavior would still be congruent with the findings of Carbonneau et al. (2008). The difference would affect the teacher in the long term not the student. Bringing beauty into the discussion of distance education theory requires what Dewey and Bentley (1949) described as a transactional understanding of experience, which moves aesthetics to the center of experience and requires accepting the idea that contexts are comprised of the histories of the participants, their feelings, their decisions in a given learning environment, and consequences those actions bring (Brinkmann, 2011; Girod, Twyman, & Wojcikiewicz, 2010; Kokkos, 2009; Parrish, 2006). The harmoniously passionate online teacher would theoretically not only engender motivation in others to construct meaning, hence producing growth in awareness and understanding, but also help make the online learning environment a beautiful place to be.

Reflection, however, is needed to make beautiful things, or to have beautiful outcomes. Online instructors should reflect upon their pedagogy and ask themselves if being passionate about their profession matters to them. In this regard, the purpose for teaching may be more important than the process itself. Furthermore, viewing students more as friends may both improve and give greater meaning to online instruction. It is agreed that the absence of

visual cues in asynchronous learning may produce learning environments that seem generic, shallow, or empty, something not resembling beauty. However, in creating personal harmony and projecting positive emotions, online instructors may help the learning environment feel vibrant. If an instructor is to improve his or her online engagement, beauty needs to come from within and be shared with students. This, as Vallerand et al. (2003) stated, is harmonious passion.

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