

Table 4 - Sample of Research Involving Online Communities: Chapter 3 - Research on Online Learning

Topic: Online Communities	Author	Description/Procedures	Results	Instructional Strategies/Activities Suggested by Study
Community development among learners	Haythornthwaite, Kazmer & Robins (2000)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Qualitative semi-structured interviews ▪ 17 Masters students enrolled in Library education cohort over 3-year period ▪ Used synchronous, asynchronous technologies including chat, Webboards, email, Real Audio, PowerPoint, and electronic chalkboards. ▪ Analyzed data using grounded theory approach focused on what characterizes community and how students define and maintain community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All students perceived a sense of community through participation in initial two-week face-to-face session and sustained in following Internet based communication ▪ Shared history, shared “survival” and working toward a common goal created a sense of community ▪ Learners provided each other with reciprocal social, emotional support and resources. ▪ Reciprocity, trust and a safe, supportive environment assisted in establishing community ▪ Students who failed to make community connections were more distressed and had difficulty adjusting to feelings of isolation in online environment ▪ Reduced cues in online environment reduced both positive and negative feedback contributing to insecurity by some students. ▪ Maintaining ties and community via CMC is perceived to require more effort than face-to-face community. ▪ Fading or disengaging from interaction is easy to do in online courses. ▪ Synchronous communication helped prevent feelings of isolation more than asynchronous and enhanced sense of community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Promote initial and sustained bonding through group interaction through multiple means of communication (including both face to face and online public and private communication) related to work and social activities. ▪ Establish regular schedule to provide opportunities for patterns of work and social exchange ▪ Provide opportunities for both public and private synchronous interaction to facilitate community building. ▪ Monitor and support continued interaction and participation. Stay aware of students who “fade back” and attempt to draw them into both social and educational interaction to facilitate community ▪ Provide students with initial feedback on appropriate communication.

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Topic: Online Communities	Author	Description/Procedures	Results	Instructional Strategies/Activities Suggested by Study
Interpersonal involvement strategies	Simich-Dudgeon (1999)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Discourse analysis ▪ Reviewed 4 graduate students communication over two week time period at beginning and end of course on Language for Specific Purposes ▪ Asynchronous computer conferencing (COW) system ▪ Analyzed category and function of involvement strategies such as images, detail, metaphor and dialogue (Tannen, 1994) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All students used involvement strategies to convey meaning ▪ Students differed in amount of sensemaking strategies used (creating images with detail, narratives, indirect speech, metaphor, dialogue, etc.) ▪ Students used metaphors and irony as well as shared personal stories that created powerful images for peers ▪ Students employed personalized greetings toward the end of course indicating an enhanced level of rapport and intimacy and providing evidence of a sense of community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Create awareness that students and instructors work collaboratively to promote shared meaning and to create a supportive learning community ▪ Consider encouraging the use of interpersonal involvement strategies such as personal stories, metaphors and irony. ▪ Encourage students to employ personalized greetings to promote a sense of community
Fostering Collaboration in Online Learning	Barab, Thomas & Merrill (2001)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Naturalistic inquiry ▪ 34 graduate students primarily online course on adult learning theory ▪ Integrated course Web site with asynchronous and synchronous tools ▪ Data included interviews, online transcripts of discussions, artifacts produced, course readings ▪ Analyzed themes that emerged related to course flexibility, co-construction and contextualization of meaning, openness and a sense of community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Students who perceived freedom and flexibility in the course through posting autobiographies, individual learning plans and other assignments that incorporated individual interests ▪ Sense of openness and collegiality was established early in course through posting autobiographies and personally meaningful course content ▪ To avoid frustration with technology, instructor provided multiple means of communication including email, telephone, fax, etc. ▪ Some students capitalized on the flexibility in accessing the course while others felt a lack of structured, dedicated time was somewhat overwhelming ▪ The personalization of course content shared with others became a significant and meaningful learning event ▪ Students were comfortable enough to share intimate life experiences and self-perceived growth. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Significant portions of online courses may involve interpersonal issues depending on course content ▪ Online courses can promote sharing of personal experiences, integration of content that is personally meaningful and establishment of a sense of community. ▪ Instructor should consider explicitly designing a course with the purpose of establishing an online community ▪ Instructors should place emphasis on course climate as well as course content to encourage the emergence of an online community. ▪ Consider asynchronous communication methods for promoting the reflective thought necessary in creating personally meaningful experiences online.

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Topic: Online Communities	Author	Description/Procedures	Results	Instructional Strategies/Activities Suggested by Study
Building Classroom Community	Rovai (2001)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Observational case study using qualitative and quantitative data ▪ 20 graduate students with previous online experience in 5-week studying distance education ▪ Totally online course using Blackboard ▪ Analyzing usage statistics, gender-based communication patterns and sense of classroom community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Majority of messages (598 of 875) were neutral, task driven and contained cognitive responses to discussion or assignments. ▪ Female messages demonstrated significantly more connected voice patterns (referring to family, self, other's family, personal experiences, praise, encouragement, support, etc) ▪ Male messages demonstrated significantly more independent voice patterns (assert self, argumentative, confrontational, etc.) ▪ Female voice was generally supportive and helpful without being assertive and had a personal orientation ▪ Male voice tended to be impersonal, assertive, possessing authoritative tone not permitting alternative views ▪ Female sense of classroom community was higher than males ▪ Those with higher sense of community primarily employed connected voice. Those with lower sense of community used independent voice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Instructors should attempt to create a sense of community through designing for and supporting student interaction and involvement ▪ Building community is supported by encouraging socio-emotional communication as well as educational task-driven interactions. ▪ Instructors should be sensitive to differences in communication patterns and adapt their teaching to facilitate interaction while not silencing any members of the group ▪ Instructors should consider incorporating a rubric to promote discussion standards to encourage uniform contributions

References:

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Haythornthwaite, C., Kazmer, M., & Robins, J. (2000). Community development among distance learners: Temporal and technological dimensions. *Journal of Computer Mediated Collaboration* [Online]. Available: <http://www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol16/issue1/haythornthwaite.html>

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