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| Type of Interactions in Asynchronous/Synchronous Communication | Pena, Schaff, Martin & Gay (2001) | Qualitative case study  
- 24 graduate & undergraduate students  
- Combination of asynchronous bulletin board system, and synchronous IRC  
- Participating in 14-week communications course examining interaction through participation, flow of interaction, character of dialogue | Asynchronous communication was more formal in nature, task-related, self-reflective and subjective  
Synchronous communication was more interactive, less task-oriented.  
Interactive messages contained questions, answers, support, clarification, consensus and social responses | Use asynchronous conferencing for reflective activities including self questioning and rationalization  
Synchronous activities are appropriate for social, brainstorming communication but not for building arguments and consensus. |
| Factors Influencing Interaction in Online Courses | Vrasidas & McIsaac (1999) | Interpretive pilot study examining conceptual framework of interaction in an online course  
- 7 graduate students  
- First Class conferencing software and complementary Website  
- First five weeks face to face, remainder of course alternating weeks of online and face to face communication | In course structure, required activities led to more interaction while the heavy workload led to less interaction.  
Students’ need for interaction (socializing, learning and discussion) was met through face-to-face interaction -- a part from the asynchronous discussion.  
Small class size impacted interaction with two students moderating and 5 students participating in discussion.  
Students felt asynchronous discussions were busywork, duplicating assignments and that they did not receive adequate feedback from their teacher or peers in the online discussion part of course.  
Those with limited prior experience using CMC participated less and felt intimidated when others used emoticons | Consider online course workload and structure of course; be careful not to duplicate assignments in face-to-face and asynchronous components of course.  
Face-to-face meetings may reduce need for online social interaction.  
Class size and adequate feedback mechanisms are important considerations in an online course.  
Prior experience, practice and providing explanations for online communication conventions are important to prevent users from feeling overwhelmed and intimidated. |
Table 3 - Sample of Research Involving Interaction: Chapter 3 - Research on Online Learning

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| Student and Teacher Perception of Interaction in Online Courses | McIsaac, Blocher, Mahes & Vrasidas (1999) | Mixed qualitative and quantitative study  
Using First Class software  
Collected usage statistics, message logs, time spent offline and post-course interviews  
Involving doctoral students in six Web courses over two years  
Study incorporated views of interactivity from both instructor and student perspective | Instructors feel they teach differently and spend more time on teaching in online context than traditional courses but that it is worthwhile  
Teachers feel they are more concerned about student participation in online environment and think the quality of interaction is better than in a traditional course  
Teacher style and background impact course structure, commitment & effectiveness  
Student interactions had specific purposes (getting help, sharing information, submitting homework, participating in discussion, socializing, etc.)  
Lack of immediate feedback contributed to feelings of isolation in students. | eLearning courses can benefit independent, motivated learners, those who want an alternative to FTF instruction, and previously unserved populations.  
Instructors add credibility as coach or facilitator rather than imposing views in online courses  
Create an environment where learners can feel socially present, providing face-to-face opportunities before meeting online  
Group activities increased interactivity and they need to be deliberately designed  
Incorporate significant personalized, feedback to avoid student feelings of isolation |
| Characteristics of Conference Interactions | Tsui & Ki (1996) | Longitudinal study over 16 months using quantitative methods and questionnaires  
First 8 months – 144 participant in-service English teachers in 15 schools, second 8 months – 333 participant teachers in 30 schools & 13 homes  
Using Lotus Notes software  
Analized message turns, different speech acts, categorized questions & sharing, tracked response patterns | Initially more instructor/staff messages than teacher participants in first 8 months  
In second 8 months, significant increase in teacher participant messages and significant increase in amount of times responding to each other.  
When initiating interactions, teachers tended to ask questions rather than respond to others  
Teachers tended to share ideas more than ask questions | Expect pattern of interaction with participants asking questions, instructor responding and acknowledging response, as well as sharing ideas.  
Expect peer communication and initiation of questions by participants to increase over time in online environment |
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References:


