

Closing the Distance in Distance Learning

Strategies to Increase Intrinsic Motivation in the Time of COVID-19

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Intriguing research shows that when students have intrinsic motives for learning—when they engage not for external reward but because they find the activity itself interesting and gratifying—they become more likely to attach meaning to their work, explore new topics, and persist in the face of learning challenges. (Usable Knowledge, 2016, para. 1)

The onset of COVID-19 presented a learning challenge, such as we have never seen before. Many of us were already consummate online or dis-

tance educators, but state-mandated social distancing, stay at home orders, and raw fear of the unknown challenged *brick and mortar* educators to rapidly reimagine and reconstruct course content while learning to navigate online communication and education platforms like Zoom and Canvas. This discussion aims to increase intrinsic motivation by optimizing the essential functions and exploring the advanced functions of the trending video communication technology Zoom. As we prepare our fall syllabi for the possibility of a new normal consisting primarily of online and blended instruction, a deeper exploration of Zoom's features is warranted to maximize the benefits of the technology and enhance the students learning experience;



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thus, closing the educational gap created during the pandemic. Just because we are distant does not mean we are not close.

Video communication and collaboration technology are not new, but with Zoom Communication Inc. (2019) reporting a 97% utilization rate in higher education, the technology is at the forefront of education's new normal. Synchronous instruction using video communication and collaboration facilitates increased student participation beyond the traditional delivery of online asynchronous course content and text-based discussions, allowing educators to close the distance and maintain a learning environment that supports the learner's autonomy, competency, and relatedness necessary to foster the development of intrinsic motivation (Kusurkar et al., 2011; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Yazdi, 2016).

INCREASING RELATEDNESS WITH ZOOM

Relatedness is the principle of self-determination theory that allows for the learner to feel connected and thus more likely to learn by and from those around them; this intellectual closeness enhances learning by making it more meaningful and increasing the learner's relatedness to the information (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Yazdi, 2016). The participant in a live video conference experiences relatedness in real-time, and for those who cannot attend the live version, there is the option of recorded Zoom meetings. Accessibility is paramount for fostering a learning environment that values diversity and ensures full participation of all students; Zoom's *Audio Transcript* option, when enabled, allows for the playback of meetings with audio transcription. However, as educators prepare for another semester of distance learning, ensuring consent and permission has been obtained from students is a must. We recommend the host enable the *multiple recording notifications* function that notifies attendees

when recording is stopped, paused, and resumed throughout the session regardless of the time, device, or method used to join the meeting. Additionally, a *recording disclaimer* function requires the attendee to consent upon entering the meeting (Zoom Video Communications, 2020).

Zoom features that enhance relatedness by increasing teacher and social presence include *Gallery View*, *Virtual Backgrounds*, *Breakout Room*, *Screen Share*, *Annotation and Whiteboard*, *Nonverbal Feedback*, *Chat*, and *Polls*. Features like Nonverbal Feedback (waving hand icon) and Polls (impromptu surveys during the video presentation) can serve the dual purpose of increasing participation and keeping track of attendance, participation, and general comprehension of the material delivered. For example, if there is a sudden marked increase in the waving hand icon during the presentation, a pause may be appropriate to allow students to digest or solve or to unmute the microphone for a live discussion on the topic.

Araujo et al. (2017) explained that intrinsic motivation stems from enthusiastic and warm instruction facilitated by the instructor's social presence; the necessity of social distancing creates the need for relatedness more now than ever. Hosting a Zoom meeting is an additional responsibility for the educator that is not for the technologically faint at heart. The host sets the tone of the setting and is responsible for managing their online learning environment in Zoom, just as the teacher does in the traditional classroom, but with the added responsibility of simultaneously navigating through functions and features while teaching the course material. A cohost can be assigned by the host and functions much like the teacher's assistant and may take responsibility for navigating through many advanced features during the live meeting. Tips to increase the teacher's social presence and relatedness include showing our talking head during the Zoom meeting to maintain our social pres-

ence in the class. One of Zoom's newer advanced features, *Touch up My Appearance*, allows the user always to look polished even when having an off day. Remember, you must be a congenial host—no happy hour snacks, but a hospitality experience, nonetheless. Distance learning does not have to distant.

UTILIZING ZOOM'S FEATURES FOR AUTONOMY AND COMPETENCY

Autonomy, according to self-determination theory, is the basic need that sustains the learner's intrinsic motivation when the learner is empowered to make choices, which in turn can increase the learner's competency, resulting in self-determined motivation (Kusurkar et al., 2011; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Yazdi, 2016). Participation is required for active learning to be achieved. Therefore, if the student chooses not to participate via video, they must be prepared to engage via the *Microphone* or *Chat* option, which allows the student to choose their preference of presence and participation and facilitating a level of autonomy. Important to note is that the use of *chat* while hosting the meeting presents challenges, specifically observing the student's body language and text while simultaneously leading the class. If assigning a cohost to monitor participation is not an option, then Zoom's advanced features in *chat* allow the host to record the entire *chat* and restrict private *chat* (between participants only, the host may still communicate privately with participants). Furthermore, the advanced feature in the video can monitor the attendees'/students' participation.

Strategies to facilitate a learning environment supportive of autonomy using Zoom include utilizing the *Polling* feature, which could allow students to choose what they want to gain from the instruction. Depending on the responses from the polls, *Breakout Rooms* with small groups collaborating on types of assignments or

presentations required in the course can also increase autonomy and relatedness simultaneously. Kusurkar et al. (2011) explained the learner's stake in the course increases when empowerment to participate in planning portions of the course is given.

Known as FLIPPED, this educational model is reaching the higher education arena and is recognized for facilitating the core principles of STD, thus increasing intrinsic motivation (Araujo et al., 2017; Sergis et al., 2018). The student in the FLIPPED virtual classroom could, for example, engage in the course material or assigned topic to teach it to the class or collaborate in a small group in the *Breakout Room* instead of memorizing the material for a test or grade. Additionally, utilizing Zoom's *Screen Share* while enabling *Coannotations* for participants allows for synchronous collaboration, which has been shown to increase student performance, and autonomy (Clark et al., 2015; Kusurkar et al., 2011). A setting in *Annotations* worth mentioning is the option of hiding the names of those annotating from other students, which may be appropriate during specific exercises when anonymity may increase participation. Another strategy for increasing autonomy that is nicely facilitated by Zoom's features is structured guidance, which can be accomplished by the host's visits into the *Breakout Rooms* where guidance or expertise to the discussion, project, or assignment is given, but the primary responsibility for learning rests on the learner. The distance seems less already.

CLOSING THE DISTANCE

Students are exhausted from living the new abnormal of the coronavirus. They may have kids or spouses or family members living with them who test the bounds of their patience—closing the distance between you as the instructor and them as the student is more important than ever.

Utilizing video communication and collaborative software, educators can employ strategies recommended above and provide the integral components of autonomy, relatedness, and competency for an intrinsically motivating experience. When students want to learn, they will learn more. When original thought and some digging reveal better ways to use Zoom, then we as teachers are well on our way to helping students reach the summit of Bloom's taxonomy of learning. No more memorizing facts; create new knowledge.

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