Improving Online Instructor/Student Communication

Context
Education that is mediated via the internet has experienced a considerable boom in participation over the past several years due to the integration of technology and its advancements in the educational milieu. Communication is important in any learning environment, but it is especially vital in an online learning environment. Communication and its many forms are the only modes for accomplishing assignments and acquiring knowledge. There must be clear communication from an online instructor to the online student so that there is a sense of belonging and individuality as well as meaningful learning.

Intervention
I aim to explore the phenomenon of social presence, specifically in an online learning environment. I want to measure how students perceive engagement via computer mediated communication. My intervention will consist of developing a module that will be completed by my students to prior to the start of the semester. The module will be a prerequisite to start the course. Also, two surveys will be given so that I can measure social presence. Midway through the course a survey will be given on social presence and teacher presence in order to measure social presence and engagement. Affective factors such as expression and cohesion plus teacher engagement such as facilitation, design and organization will be measured to quantify social presence. The same survey will be given towards the end of the semester to measure gains in social presence.

Social Presence Theory
Short, Williams, and Christie (1976) developed the theory of social presence to explain the outcomes that telecommunications media can have on communication. They theorized that there is a difference in communication media along with their degree of social presence and that these differences play an important role in how people interact.

Online Social Presence Theory
Tu and McIsaac (2002) sought to explain social presence through interaction in online classes. They redefined social presence for online learning environments as the degree of feeling perception and the reaction of being connected via computer-mediated communication to another intellectual entity.

Theory of Transactional Distance
Moore (1997) in his Theory of Transactional Distance, theorizes that in distance learning there is separation between the teacher and students that can lead to communication gaps, a psychological space of potential misunderstandings between the behaviors of instructors and those of the learners.
Reference:


