Creating a Virtual Learning Community

Create a Supportive Teaching Presence

As the teacher, you set the tone and culture of your online course community. Students should feel that the teachers is accessible to them and invested in their learning. (Lehman and Conceical 2010). Students need to know that someone is leading their learning experience.

STEPS TO DEMONSTRATE A SENSE OF PRESENCE

1. Send a "Welcome letter" and/or welcome video in the beginning of the course
2. Provide examples and information from your experiences in your interactions with students
3. Provide an opportunity for students to introduce themselves and share interests
4. Pause and use check-ins or emojis to gauge interest, agreement and mood throughout virtual synchronous lessons.
5. Conduct a survey prior to the start of the course to learn about student prior knowledge interests and concerns related to course content
6. Use polling and surveys throughout the instruction to gain insight into students' level of interest, understanding and engagement
7. Use video, voice or images to provide both contextual and supportive feedback on assignments.
8. Provide opportunities for collaborative learning and "group think" through discussion boards, or shared postings. (thinking shared graphic organizers, padlet etc)
9. Be inclusive: provide accommodations so that all students have tools and skills to access the curriculum and participate in learning activities.

Set Norms and Expectations

An important step for ensuring a successful experience for both the teacher and students is to proactively set clear norms and expectations. Students need to know how they should participate in "virtual group sessions" as well as the expectations for attendance and engagement of their online asynchronous learning activities.

1. EXPECTATIONS FOR ASYNCHRONOUS LEARNING
    a. Expected time on task each day/week
    b. Check email/communication daily
    c. Communicate with the teacher regularly
    d. Maintain pace, complete assignments on time
    e. Provide explicit directions on how to submit completed work

2. HOW TO THE ENGAGE IN ASYNCHRONOUS LESSONS
    a. Cameras on/off
    b. Use of chat during direct instruction
    c. Expectations for participation during discussions, polling and small group activities

3. LET STUDENTS KNOW WHAT THEY CAN EXPECT FROM THEIR TEACHER
    a. When will grading be completed
    b. How and when you can be contacted for extra support

4. EMPOWER LEARNERS BY COMMUNICATING THEIR ROLE/RESPONSIBILITIES IN LEARNING. ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO:
    a. Establish daily/weekly routine for learning
    b. Create a quite organized place for learning
    c. Reach out to adults at home, teachers, counselors or mentor when they need help
    d. Read and respond to teacher feedback within assignments
    e. Create a schedule and routine for learning
    f. Maintain engagement in learning tasks
    g. Completion of assignments to maintain pacing

5. EXPLICITLY DISCUSS AND ENSURE STUDENTS UNDERSTAND
    a. Academic integrity
    b. Digital Citizenship
    c. Plagiarism

Develop Systems of Support

Something about developing resilient and self-directed learners. Also add about reducing anxiety as they know how to get support when a teacher or learning coach is not available.

- Explicitly show students the location of and how to navigate help center and support resources.
- Instruct students as to how to get technical support and provide contact information
- Develop an FAQ Center for frequently asked questions within the curricular content to avoid answering the same questions over and over. Students can go to the FAQ first before emailing a question. If the question is in the center, the teacher can insert a link into the email instead of typing the same answers multiple times.