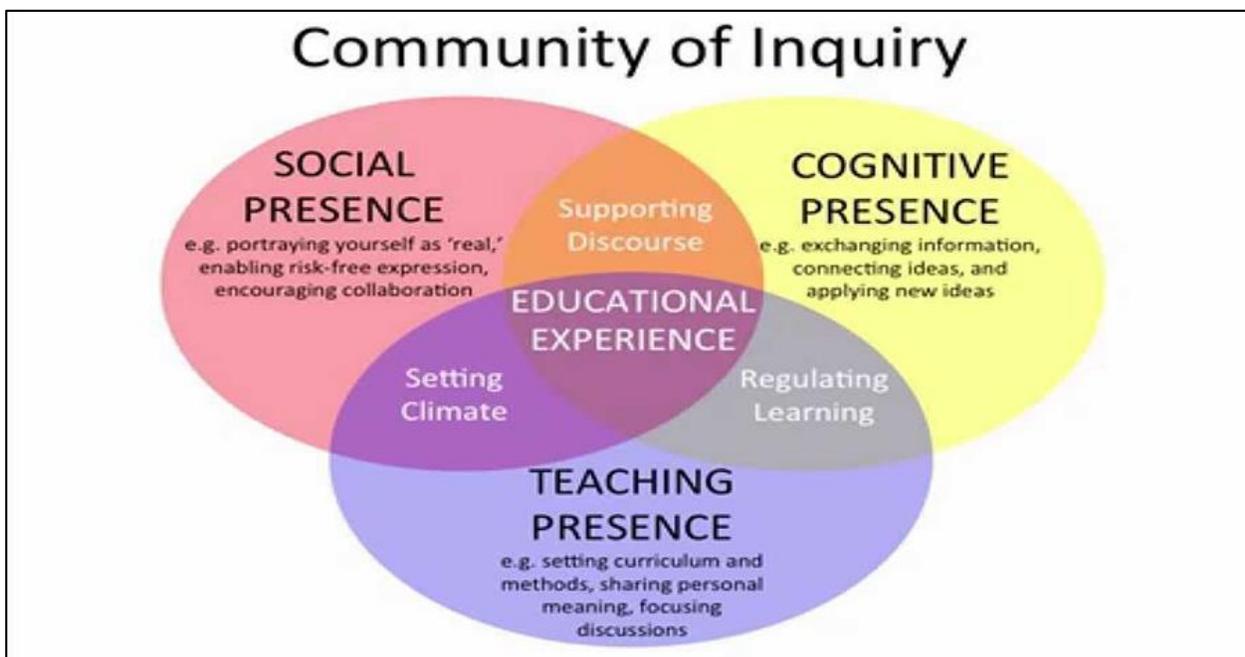


Promoting Interaction: Teaching effectively in a virtual world

If your summer has been anything like mine, you have worked to take offerings you typically instruct and have had to deliver them remotely. I have loads of experience with course design, and I work in a teacher education program where I actually teach people how to teach; so how hard could this be? Turns out, a little bit hard...

There are definite variations between a face-to-face (F2F) platform and a virtual one, but one thing that is consistent is how people learn. People learn best by doing—by being involved in their own learning and the learning of their peers. It is important to understand the power of interaction and what this really means to your course design.



Community of Inquiry Model

The Community of Inquiry (COI) model was developed by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) and follows the constructivist theory put forth by John Dewey in the early roots of educational theory. It provides a framework for creating a rich, collaborative learning environment to enhance critical thinking through the

interaction of three overlapping pillars---social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence.

The COI was built as a framework for online, asynchronous (not live) environments, but it is applicable to F2F and synchronous, remote learning as well. Let's look at each element of the model.

Social Presence: Interaction with others

Social presence is the opportunity for students to portray themselves as “real people” and to establish purposeful relationships in a learning community. It is exemplified through open collaboration and discussions. These types of interactions won't just happen by circumstance, as an instructor, you have to plan for this and be prepared for how to bring your students to the discussion. (Look at our Tips, *Teaching effectively in a virtual world* for more on this.)

What might this look like?

- *Look at the functionalities of your virtual platform. As an example, the Chat feature or the Discussion Board are great tools for interaction.*
- *Breakout rooms are a second feature that your platform might have. If this isn't a function, be creative with workarounds using other technology (like cell phones and/or Google Docs) to put students into small groups for discussion or for them to create something to demonstrate understanding.*

Cognitive Presence: Interaction with content

As instructors, we are usually pretty good at putting forth the content that students need to be successful in whatever it is that we are teaching. But we do want to be sure that our students are *interacting* with the content, not simply being exposed to it or passively sitting by while it is presented. When students sit and passively watch or listen to you lecture

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(whether in person or online) they are not actively engaging with the content. The more active someone is (cognitively speaking) the more they will actually retain from the material presented. Cognitive presence is allowing students to construct meaning, confirm understanding, and reflect.

What might this look like?

- *Create a video lecture and send ahead of your session. Give students a task to perform with the content of the video (What is the value of this topic? How have I applied this in my own life already? What are three items from the content that seem important?).*
- *During the session, put students into break out groups with the assignment of learning a portion of the content and reporting back out to the class.*
- *Post a question and have students do their own research and respond.*

Teaching Presence: Interaction with the instructor

Of course we want our students to interact with us. Connecting with your students is the third leg of this powerful triad and is significant in determining the overall satisfaction of your learners. But teaching presence is also the binder for the entire framework. The other two elements of the COI are dependent on the presence of the instructor—not just to “be there”, but to design the course to allow for the other elements as well as to focus the learning. Learning requires a plan for instruction. If your course happens to be asynchronous, you really have to plan for how you will continue to be a presence in the class without actually being physically in the class. While interaction with others and with the content is important, without the structure and facilitation of the instructor, the other two types of presence won't be effective.

What might this look like?

- *For a synchronous session, log in early with your camera and microphone on to greet students and engage them in conversation.*
- *Additionally, be explicit with your expectations and instructions and make a plan for collaboration.*

- *If asynchronous, send a welcome video to humanize yourself and then provide regular communication over the span of the course to keep a sense of presence and structure. Communicate often and regularly.*

The COI Framework gives us a great foundation for designing our classes to maximize learning. Whether you are teaching virtually or in a traditional classroom setting, your daily lessons should reflect each type of presence to promote a positive learning environment.

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