

Module – Online Teaching Methodology and Strategies

Lesson 1 – Establishing Instructor Presence

Description:

This lesson will cover common strategies of establishing instructor presence in the online environment.

Objectives

The Learner will:

- Examine the benefits of establishing instructor presence
- Evaluate common techniques for supporting and encouraging students in the online environment using the Community of Inquiry (Coi) framework.
- Develop a plan for establishing presence in your online courses.

Online Lesson:

Learning Module –

Presentation Mode: (To be determined)

Topics:

Instructor presence

One of the most important relationships in an online course is that between the teacher and student.

When students relate to an online instructor as something more than a subject matter expert and begin to conceive of themselves as part of a larger community, they are more likely to be motivated, be satisfied with their learning, and succeed in achieving the course objectives (Picciano, 2002; Rovai & Barnum, 2003; Richardson & Swan, 2003).

Deep and meaningful learning (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000) is most possible when the learner is immersed in an environment that is designed to be social and dynamic through the development of three interdependent elements - teaching, social, and cognitive presence.

Known more commonly as the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework, these elements when incorporated in an online course, help foster a group of individuals who collaboratively engage in critical thinking and reflection to construct personal meaning and mutual understanding.

ELEMENTS	CATEGORIES	INDICATORS (examples only)
Social Presence	Open Communication Group Cohesion Affective Expression	Risk-free expression Encourage collaboration Emoticons
Cognitive Presence	Triggering Event Exploration Integration Resolution	Sense of puzzlement Information exchange Connecting ideas Apply new ideas
Teaching Presence	Design & Organization Facilitating Discourse Direct Instruction	Setting curriculum & methods Sharing personal meaning Focusing discussion

Teaching presence is about establishing ground rules and opportunities for learning and interaction between students and the instructor through design, facilitation, and direct instruction. Social presence is about your actual interaction with students such as building open communication, along with being supportive and empathetic. Cognitive presence is about providing students with opportunities to observe and share how they are building or confirming their own meaning and understanding of the concepts or of the learning process.

Here is a video by Jered Borup that summarizes the Community of Inquiry framework:

<https://youtu.be/273WuFa6Z04>

In the next section, we will dive deeper individually into each one of these elements with a specific focus on interactivity between the instructor and the student.

Establishing teaching presence

Teaching presence begins before the course commences as the teacher, acting as instructional designer, plans and prepares the course of studies, and it continues during the course, as the instructor facilitates the discourse and provides direct instruction when required (Anderson, et al, 2001).

Course Design

Your teaching presence is first evident in the design of your online course and course materials. While this particular module is not focused on course design, you should be able to answer the following questions for each lesson or module in your course (Fink, 2005):

- What do I want students to learn in this module?
- How will students demonstrate their learning of the materials in this module?
- What assignments or learning activities will support the learning for this module?

Design Implications for Instructor Presence

In addition to the questions regarding your course design, you should also ask yourself:

- Are there ample opportunities throughout the course for students to engage in a meaningful dialogue with me as the instructor?
- Are there ample opportunities throughout the course for students to engage in a meaningful dialogue with other students?

When you design your course with interactivity in mind, you will create an environment where a Community of Inquiry is possible.

Facilitating Dialogue Online

Another important element of teaching presence is facilitation of dialogue online. This is akin to setting the stage for learning and designing interaction between you and your students. You are defining the ground rules for what you expect from students regarding communication, tone or style of writing, rigor, and student presence in the course. However, beyond that you are also defining what students should expect from you as the facilitator of the course.

Most commonly, these expectations are well defined in the syllabus, in a course orientation lesson at the start of the course, or in some combination of the two. The next sections are some common ideas that will help you facilitate online discourse:

Communication Guidelines - a set of guidelines for communication for inside and outside the learning management system. At the very least, set guidelines for:

- Acceptable communication tools - clarify what are the best methods to communicate with you. (Examples: email, phone, text, IM, Twitter, etc.)
- Message format/essentials - clarify what information should students share with every communication such as their full name as listed on the roster, course/section number or a callback number.
- Appropriate timeframe for communicating with you - if you plan to accept phone calls or text messages, clearly state appropriate times and days you will be available.
- Expectations for your response - clearly state how long it will take you to respond to student message. When you establish your virtual office hours, communicate that you may not answer synchronous communication outside of your posted hours.

Keep in mind that when you provide students with synchronous communication options, they may try to reach out to you at odd hours or during times near assignment due dates. Your students will have a variety of factors they have to deal with including different work schedules, family commitments and so forth. In addition, students who travel for their jobs could be in different time zones or have difficulty finding reliable Internet access.

Provide a variety of communication modes to give students more flexibility in how they can reach you. Also, consider establishing virtual office hours during or near any class due dates so that you are available to answer student questions immediately before they submit an activity.

Here are some examples of communication guidelines for online courses.

<Example 1><Example 2><Example 3>...

Going “Next Level”

What is your availability on weekends or during holidays? Send out an announcement or a class message if you are not going to be available, especially if your availability deviates from your published guidelines.

Class Discussions - Facilitating discussions throughout the course is one of the most important ways to exhibit teaching presence. You don’t have to be hyperactive in the discussion but aim to establish a presence in discussions by participating in the dialogue or by summarizing thoughtful discussions. The table below shows some other examples you can use when facilitating discussions.

Examples of Facilitating Online Discourse During the Course	
Types of Facilitation	Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Identifying areas of agreement / disagreement	“Joe, Mary has provided a compelling counter-example to your hypothesis. Would you care to respond?”
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Seeking to reach consensus / understanding	“I think Joe and Mary are saying essentially the same thing.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Encouraging, acknowledging, or reinforcing student contributions	“Thank you for your insightful comments.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Setting climate for learning	“Don’t feel self-conscious about ‘thinking out loud’ on the forum. This is a place to try out new ideas after all.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Drawing in participants, prompting discussion	“Any thoughts on this issue?” “Anyone care to comment?”
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Assessing the efficacy of the process	“I think we’re getting a little off track here.”

<https://www.duq.edu/about/centers-and-institutes/center-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-and-learning/establishing-an-online-teaching-presence>

Providing Direct Instruction

Last but not least, you can exhibit teaching presence through direct instruction. Direct instruction refers to your actions as an instructor in the course. It allows you to display your expertise in the subject matter throughout the course. Examples include:

- Presenting content or a lecture in the course - could be text based or a video you share with personalized commentary from you.
- Posing critical thinking questions on discussions or in an announcement - challenge your students to think critically or to see a more holistic view of the subject matter
- Summarizing your thoughts on a topic or an area of focus - point out the dialogue that was most meaningful, that models the types of responses appropriate for the topic, or that displayed confirmation of their understanding of the concepts.
- Focusing the discussion or dialogue when needed - bring them back to the main area of discussion
- Diagnosing misperceptions - correct misconceptions so that students have a better understanding of the concepts or issues at hand
- Injecting knowledge from diverse sources - consider sharing multiple intellectual perspectives on a topic so that students see varying views or perspectives
- Responding to technical concerns - you can address this one-on-one or as a community. Consider creating a general forum for questions or a specific "technical questions" forum

Adapted from (Bill Pelz —(My) Three Principles Of Effective Online Pedagogy,|| Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, Volume 8, Issue 3: June 2004.)

We will dive deeper into feedback strategies in the next lesson.

Going "Next Level"

Conduct a direct instruction audit of your course where you determine how much direct instruction you currently provide. If you need to add more direct instruction, consider adding a variation from the examples provided.

Establishing social presence

"Cultivating supportive online learning environments is an art that begins with nurturing connectedness and community through social presence." - Aimee Whiteside, Amy Dikkers and Somer Lewis

<https://er.educause.edu/articles/2014/5/the-power-of-social-presence-for-learning>

Social presence goes beyond the act of being a "real" person online by demonstrating or sharing personal characteristics with your online community. It is measured by the level of connectedness students have with the instructor and with other students.

Social presence in an online course helps students reduce stress and feelings of isolation. High levels of social presence in the online environment have a direct correlation to high levels of student satisfaction and students overall perceived learning (Richardson, 2003).

In the following video (18 minutes), Dr. Patrick Lowenthal from Boise State University discusses his research on social presence in online teaching and learning and his

recommendations for increasing social presence online. As you watch, consider how you can build a community of learners where students feel nurtured and connected to you and to other students.

<https://youtu.be/bDX4ubmPNNg?t=3m3s> - start at 3.00

Let's review three key aspects to social presence in more detail: open communication, group cohesion, and affective expression.

Open Communication

As we mentioned in the section on course design and facilitating online discourse, your online course should have well-defined channels of communication. Moreover, you should regularly use them to connect with students and to encourage them to connect with each other.

Open communication can be established early on through ice breaker activities or throughout the course by establishing informal online meeting spaces where students can openly discuss relevant topics or collaborate on activities.

Keep in mind that you as the instructor and designer of the course are responsible for creating these communication channels within the learning management system. Students certainly have the ability to build connections outside of the online classroom but they are more likely to do so if you encourage them. Do your best to allow your students to connect by openly praising them when they communicate with you or when they help each other in the course.

Going "Next Level"

Consider creating a "Questions" forum where students can ask course-related questions. If a student emails you a question, answer their question and direct them to post the question and answer on the forum for others to see it. When a student answers another student's question on the forum, thank them directly on the forum. This will encourage students to use the forum for quick answers.

Instructional Technology Considerations

Before you determine the collaboration tools you plan to use in your course, consider the following factors:

- You and your students' aptitude with the technology - Students are likely to reach out to you when the technology is unfamiliar or isn't working. Be prepared to help them navigate the issues early on.
- Students' instructional needs - Does the technology make it easier for students to connect to you or each other? Are there alternatives they could use instead?
- Financial cost to students- Is there a cost associated with the use of the tool? Have you made that clear up-front?
- High tech or low tech - Do you need a high tech solution or will a low tech solution give you the same or better result? Sometimes, high tech solutions are functionally great but they have a much higher learning curve. Consider your audience.
- Accessibility and student privacy - Are the technologies accessible to students with disabilities? If you are using a third-party software vendor, are they collecting student information? If so, what are they doing with it?

In this video, David Mulder discusses some of the types of tools one can use to increase social presence in an online course.

<https://youtu.be/U96R6ij9g0Q>

Review the module on blackboard for an overview of all available online communication and collaboration tools.

Group Cohesion

While it is valuable to create an environment with effective communication channels and where students develop social bonds, the community is only sustainable if it can coalesce around a shared goal or purpose (Garrison, 2007). That is, group cohesion is only sustained through open communication that is purposeful and intellectually focused.

You may find it useful early on to develop activities that build on social trust and community such as ice breakers and some of the other examples we discussed previously. As we mentioned, this creates a sense of trust where students feel comfortable enough to be able to have an open dialogue.

Once you've build that trust early on, you can build on the community by focusing on shared or community activities that are more academically focused where students critically evaluate concepts and have discussions that lead to a deeper understanding of the material.

In this video, Alexandra Pickett discusses how to create cohesion in an online course.

<https://youtu.be/cWZrWLB3sLU>

Guiding Communication

Set a high standard for your students in their public communication by being explicit about your expectations for each mode that you use in your online classroom. Students may need to be reminded that the level of speech should be appropriate to the task. For example, text-messaging style is not acceptable in formal discussion board activities or for academic papers but is acceptable in instant messaging or if they text you.

Be the first to post and model the type of online behavior you expect from your students. You can model the tone, level of formality, and quality you want in your communication. In any mode of public communication, it is best to handle problem behavior 'offline' by personal email or phone.

Going "Next Level"

Consider what those interactions should look like in your course and establish "ground rules" for academic dialogue between students. They can be as simple as

1. Be respectful at all times
2. Challenge ideas, not people
3. Use formal etiquette when addressing each other

Add these rules to the syllabus and to every assignment instructions where these tools will be used.

Affective Expression (Emotional Presence)

“To engage in education innovation with no reference to emotion, and continue to assume learners are little more than dispassionate thinkers, would be to miss a fundamental influence on education.” - Cleveland-Innes, M., & Campbell, P., 2012

Affective expression refers to the online instructor and/or the students’ ability to express feelings, emotion, or mood. It is measured by how free students feel to be able to express themselves and by the instructor’s perceived openness, mood, and tone.

In this video, Alexandra Pickett summarizes affective expression.

<https://youtu.be/ZicSKQRCxPM>

Ice Breakers - Increase affective expression early in the term through an icebreaker introduction where you ask students to introduce themselves and identify commonalities. Students are more likely to be open with each other and you if you give them an opportunity to get to know each other before more academic discussions begin.

Let’s expand on the concept of affective expression and its implications online by reviewing a key skill you can use to increase affective expression in your course.

Empathy Defined

“Empathy is foundational for building bridges between individuals, understanding each others’ complex emotions, gaining a diverse perspective, and leveraging relationships for collaboration and progress.” - Jordan Catapano, Teach Hub

Empathy is a learned skill and is often traditionally defined as being able to “walk a day in someone else’s shoes.” That is, having the ability to see the world through someone else’s eyes. In academia, we differentiate between two types of empathy: **Affective empathy** which refers to our feelings or emotions in response to other’s emotions and **Cognitive empathy** which is our ability to identify and understand other’s emotions.

Empathy can often be mistaken for sympathy, or often it is thought to be perceived as the instructor being too easy or a pushover. However, this is not true. Let’s be very clear about what empathy is and isn’t:

Empathy is:	Empathy is not:
Being emotionally present for students - your potential greatest value as the online instructor is to be there for them academically and emotionally	Demonstrating agreement - understanding does not imply agreement. It’s okay to say that you do not agree with their perspective so long as you effectively communicate your understanding of theirs

Showing and communicating emotional understanding - responding with "I've been there" or "You seem to be frustrated and I get it" will show students that you understand them on an emotional level	Giving advice or offering to fix the situation - avoid, at least early on, with attempting to offer advice or solutions. Whenever possible, ask question that guide students to their own solutions
Understanding perspectives that are different than yours - try to take your feelings out of the equation and aim to see the world from their point of view	Necessarily a "teachable" moment - avoid responding with "I told you so" or "It could be worse" when students are sharing something personal. At that moment, students don't need a lecture, they may need a hug or a tissue.
Suspending judgement so that students feel open to share emotionally - thank them for sharing their story, it isn't always easy to ask for help or to talk about painful or difficult situations	Being too flexible or a pushover - empathy doesn't mean that you need to need to make your course less rigorous. Online students require flexibility but they don't require less rigor than your face-to-face courses

The following is an RSA video by Dr. Brené Brown where she discusses empathy.
<https://youtu.be/1Evwqu369Jw>

The Empathic Online Teacher

We know that our students face a multitude of barriers such as family obligations, poverty or hunger, technology limitations, learning disabilities, etc.. Increasingly, our role as educators in a community college environment is to help remove barriers to student success. We know from research of community college students (CCCSE, 2016) that they need the following:

- A strong start
- A clear, coherent experience within and outside of the classroom
- Integrated support
- High expectations and high support
- True engagement at many levels
- Our investment: relationship (encouragement), financial (support services), and time(see the student as a whole person).
- Re-imagination of our individual roles as part of the student experience

Think about these needs in the context of the online environment and the skill set required by all instructors and support staff to be able to meet students where they are. One of the main skills needed to be effective online is empathy. To increase your use of empathy online, let's review behaviors based on concepts developed by Dr. Helen Riess who has extensively researched empathy and the neuroscience of emotions. The following are list of recommended behaviors to increase empathy in your online course:

1. "I see you" - demonstrate to every student that you "see" them in every sense of the word possible. Introduce yourself to them early on in an ice breaker or discussion. Some instructors schedule a call with every student early in the term just to get to know them or answer any questions they may have. Think "high touch" over "high

tech.”

2. Find ways to communicate your positive emotions - be mindful that emotion is much more difficult to convey online. If possible, vary how you communicate with students one-on-one and with the class in general. Give encouraging feedback for every assignment; post regular announcements. Ask students for general feedback in discussions. The better pulse you have of how students are doing, the more responsive you can be when an issue arises.
3. When a student communicates with you to ask a question or to complain, try to identify the emotion they are conveying or trying to convey in the moment when they sent you the message. This will help you determine the best way to respond. Communicate that you understand that they may be feeling “frustrated” or “isolated” and offer assistance or solutions that fit within your course policies. Often student questions are useful to informing you of potential issues with your course so do not ignore them or take them lightly.
4. Pick up on your student’s tone - when a student calls you, do they sound stressed? Perhaps they called to talk about an assignment but they could be dealing with issues outside of class. Sometimes asking a simple “are you okay?” or offering to listen to how bad their day has been could be the difference between their success or failure.
5. Try to hear the whole person/situation - Learn from the experiences of others to better serve and ask questions for clarification. You may have heard the same issue five times today, that doesn’t mean that the fifth student’s question is any less important than the first. Treat each communication as an individual issue because they can be nuanced and your response may have to be different for each student.
6. Consider your empathic response - nothing says “I see you” like a positive, encouraging tone. Online students are not able to see or hear any social cues, such as nonverbal facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice. Sarcasm intended as joking can be easily misinterpreted. A significant amount of communication in an online course relies on the instructor and students’ ability to interpret each other’s written words. Whenever possible, err on the side of over-clarification when communicating and encourage your students to do the same. A conversational approach that reflects your personality is recommended for all of your communication.

Here are some examples of instructors using empathy in various communications with students

<Example 1> <Example 2> <Example 3>

The following video is a great example of empathy in the online environment. A student shares a powerful story and the instructor responds with encouragement and empathy. (Shared by Michelle Pacansky-Brock)

<https://youtu.be/crBh2UetEu0>

Your Online Teaching Persona

“In order to effectively establish and maintain an active learning community, the instructor must establish his or her teaching persona and maintain it throughout the course...” - (Kelly, 2011)

Students want to feel like their online instructors are more than just a blank face somewhere beyond the screen. When you intentionally design an online teaching persona, it can have a significant impact on course design, feedback mechanisms, communication tools,

etc. Think about your online teaching persona and what you aim to convey to student about yourself and about your teaching style. Determine the type of instructor you aim to be online, your authentic self, and design your course and communications to support and maintain that persona.

The University of Central Florida developed an Online Teaching Persona Checklist. The purpose of this worksheet is to focus on your teaching persona, contemplate your teaching philosophy, determine how you might apply your philosophy and persona in an online course. Take a moment to complete the worksheet. <Faculty mentor? Faculty coach?>

<Need this updated to present tense>

<https://webcourses.ucf.edu/courses/1246849/pages/online-teaching-persona-worksheet>

Establishing cognitive presence

"Cognition is a fundamental characteristic of any learning event, as our brain must physically change for learning to occur. Cognitive presence is sharing how our brain is adapting, integrating, thinking and sometimes struggling with concepts, ideas and structure. It is a presence that requires that we observe our own learning and how we build and confirm meaning. It is a rich concept with many dimensions and possibilities." - (Beottcher, 2012)

Cognitive presence refers to the extent that learners are able to construct and confirm meaning through sustained and collaborative discourse (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2001). Cognitive presence is measured by the level of higher order thinking, knowledge acquisition, application, and reflection as part of the course design. This is typically determined in the design of the course and supported through the development of higher order learning outcomes.

The following outlines an effective process for for building activities that increase cognitive presence in your course:

Triggering event — a problem, challenge, or task proposed by you, the faculty member as part of the design of your course. This means using problem-solving strategies as a way of achieving some of your course goals. This could be in the form of scenario assignments or problem-based learning group assignment.

Exploration — the process of both individual reflection by the students and the discourse through which the problem formulation occurs. Some of the indicators that exploration is occurring are divergent ideas, exchange of information, brainstorming, and requests for feedback on ideas. Consider adding activities where students can continue discussing the concepts or assignment they reviewed or completed.

Integration — the process by which the members of the community reflect individually and as a group and then reach some convergences by connecting ideas, identifying relationships and patterns, and proposing solutions. Do you provide opportunities for students to reflect on the material or the assignments?

Resolution — the group or larger community applies and tests solutions in the real world scenarios. Learners defend their resolutions and the thinking that supports them.

Adapted from Boettcher, 2012 E-Coaching Tip 36: Cognitive Presence in Online Courses — Are You Doing It?

Depending on the scope and learning goals in your course, you may find it difficult to incorporate all these components in your course. It may be easier to design activities with triggering events and exploration rather than integration or resolution. Utilize the components that will have the most impact and foster deep and meaningful learning in your course.

The following video (2 minutes) from Quality by Design discusses some ways you can create cognitive presence in your course.

<https://youtu.be/-6IwxI2XkVY>

Wrap Up

As you think about the ways to increase instructor presence in your course, utilize tools and strategies that will best fit your teaching style and will show students your authentic self. If needed, start small by incorporating one or two changes every term and assess its impact.

In this next lesson, we will dive deep into grading and feedback.

Outside Links:

<https://www.duq.edu/about/centers-and-institutes/center-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-and-learning/establishing-an-online-teaching-presence>

<https://www.kqed.org/mindshift/47502/empathy-is-tough-to-teach-but-is-one-of-the-most-important-life-lessons>

<https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/online-education/convey-your-online-teaching-persona/>

<https://www.facultyfocus.com/articles/online-education/five-ways-to-build-community-in-online-classrooms/>

Lesson References

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Richardson, J. C., & Swan, K. (2003). Examining social presence in online courses in relation to students' perceived learning and satisfaction. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 7(1), February 2003, 68-88.

Graphics and Multimedia:

Supporting Documents:

Assignments and Assessments:

Online:

"Communication Guidelines" - develop and/or share the communication guidelines you plan or currently use in your course.

"Online Persona" assignment – complete the online persona checklist to develop a plan to increase CoI

Offline:

"Introductory Video" - film on your own and submit for feedback or meet with coach to

film

Lesson 1 Parking Lot:

The end goals of humanized online learning are fostered through integrating learners voices, engaging students in the active construction of knowledge, fostering emotional connections, and providing students with choices.

Course Overview (Calendar) - a complete overview or calendar for the entire course. The calendar should include items such as:

- General topics to be covered or lesson titles
- A list of all required (gradable) assignments with due dates
- Required readings per topic or lesson

<Graphic>

Here of some examples of course calendars for online courses.

<Example 1><Example 2><Example3>...

Going "Next Level"

Consider creating an importable calendar file (.ics) with all assignments and exam due dates to share with students so that they can import important class dates into their personal calendars.

Late work Policy - a policy that clearly states whether or not you accept late work and if you do, under what conditions you will accept it. You may find that you have a varied policy based on if the activity is a online test or a submittable assignment.

Here of some examples of Late Work Policies for online courses.

<Example 1><Example 2><Example3>...

Going "Next Level"

Extensions to this policy may include on what conditions will you provide additional assignment attempts or step-by-step instructions for what to do in the event that a student experiences a technical issue on the day of an exam or assignment due date.

Extra Credit Policy - a policy that clearly states whether or not you plan to offer extra credit work and if you do, under what conditions you will accept it.

Going "Next Level"

Consider the value of that extra credit assignment to the overall course. Perhaps it would be more effective to allow students to complete an assignment late instead of developing another assignment for the purposes of extra credit.

Instructor's Tone

How an online instructor presents himself/herself in the written word is extremely important. Student motivation, performance, and satisfaction are tied to the presence and tone provided by the instructor. It is not only vital to maintain the continual communication flow in an online course, but also to foster a deliberately positive tone.

students aren't the only ones who can feel isolated in the online environment. While many of you will get to know your online students' writing style, do you really get to know them

as students. Regularly check in on them. Many of them want to get to know you, you just have to be willing to open that door.