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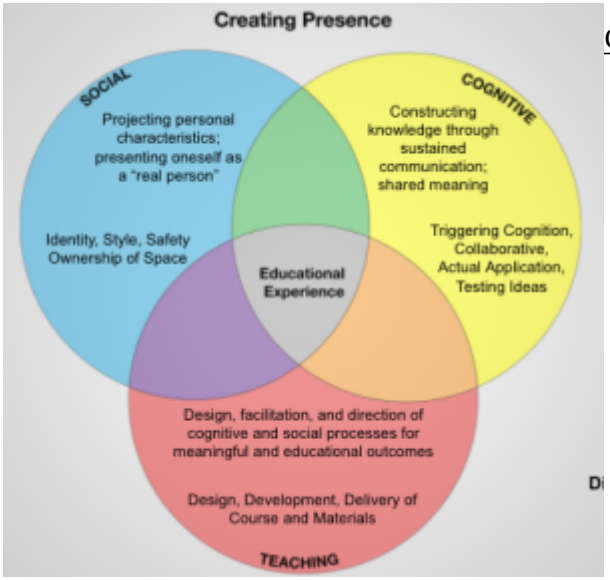
Strategies for Promoting Cognitive Presence in your Online Course [1]



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Created by Sarah North

Presence contributes greatly to creating meaningful and impactful learning experiences. In this blog series we will highlight some tried-and-true strategies for building teaching, social, and cognitive presence in your classes. Also provided are some suggested approaches to addressing common challenges. These challenges and solutions have been collected from the literature surrounding the Community of Inquiry (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000), and from faculty contributions over the years as participants in professional development communities led by the Office of Digital Education. This post will focus on **cognitive presence.**

Cognitive Presence

"Cognitive presence is the extent to which learners are able to construct and confirm meaning through reflection and discourse and is defined as a four stage process of practical inquiry"

(Boston et al., 2010, p.69).

The components of Cognitive Presence are:

Triggering Event

Exploration

Integration

Resolution

Triggering Event

“First is a triggering event, where an issue or problem is identified for further inquiry” (ibid).

- Design discussions and assignments with thoughtful, intentional prompts

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Exploration

“Next is exploration, where students explore the issue both individually and as a community, through reflection and discourse” (ibid).

- Iterative practice
    - Use drafts and scaffolded projects to allow multiple feedback points and encourage consistent growth
    - Have students do a smaller assignment multiple times with one variable changed (for instance, How does this change if you have a different audience? What if the initial assumption is different? etc)
- Use collaboration, group projects, or team-based learning to encourage deeper dives into the material.
- Incorporate different tools for discussion (such as the Knowmia Conversations feature, Flipgrid, or open annotation tools) to better facilitate different types of discussion
- Project-based learning
    - Focus on process rather than outcome
    - Opportunity for students to test out concepts
    - Consider if you can give your students choice in the format of the final product (aka, do all final reports need to be the same or could they be written report, a video, a webpage, an infographic, etc?)
    - Use small groups for collaborative problem-solving
    - Replicate a workplace-based scenario
    - Better reflective of practice post-degree
    - Assign group roles
- Peer Reviews
    - Incorporate into earlier, smaller pieces of larger projects to expose students to multiple approaches/ideas, as well as provide different types of feedback
    - Give students a rubric to help guide their reviews/feedback
    - Use peer review to support iterative work
    - Integrate “lessons learned” from peer-review process into self-evaluation and/or

reflection (for example, How did your perspective and/or final product change as a result of peer feedback?)

Challenge 1: Student/peer critiques and depth of feedback

- Have students participate in creating guidelines for quality feedback
- Give students the opportunity to ask for specific formative feedback from peers
- Offer students rubrics to use in giving peers feedback

Challenge 2: Incorporating guest lectures, and in-class discussion with experts

- Virtual 'site-visits' and talks/recorded lectures by experts
- Zoom topic breakout rooms with limited time to ask experts questions (like a speed dating format, but with small groups of students talking with a guest expert)
- Have students submit questions in advance of expert Zoom visit or recording so there is less reliance on real-time interactions

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Integration

“The third stage is integration, where learners construct meaning from ideas developed during exploration” (ibid).

- Incorporate different strategies for discussion (student-led, role-based, shifting audiences) based on the purpose of discussion in the course
- Promote iterative practice by having students create different versions of a project through drafts, ePortfolios, or shifted prompts (for example, perhaps they need to explain one concept to two different audiences).
- Use discussions as an opportunity to have students draw from their own perspective/experience and make connections to course concepts
- Student-led instruction
    - Tap into different motivators
    - Encourage higher-level thinking
    - Opportunity for students to explore topics of interest to them personally in greater depth
    - Could be used with small groups
- Constructive feedback
    - Ensure that feedback is actionable
    - If possible, allow students to respond to feedback with follow-up questions and/or a revised product
    - Use feedback to encourage/expand student strengths by pointing out what’s working well

Challenge 1: Building students' grasp of complex concepts through scholarly discourse

- Host a debate between individuals or groups (can be synchronous or asynchronous)
- Add a short recording explaining or framing the concept to the discussion prompt so students can more easily ask questions, discuss amongst themselves, etc.
- Have students create materials to explain the concept to each other and then do a short recording to share with others

Challenge 2: Promoting critical thinking and complex learning

- Layer in opportunities for reflective thinking: blogs, mini-projects, short reflections, etc can be good for this
- When possible, replace basic content consumption with opportunities to put concepts into practice
- Offer opportunities for students to update/improve work after receiving feedback
- Scaffold larger projects or use a multi-stage project to scaffold a complex concept
- Resource for problem-based learning/course design

Resolution

“Finally, the process culminates in resolution, where learners apply the new knowledge…”(ibid).

- Provide students with opportunities for self-evaluation and reflection on their coursework and/or learning process.
- Exploration beyond the classroom
    - Assignments that incorporate material not found inside the course (for instance, attend a virtual townhall, visit a local art installation, explore digital repositories, etc)
    - Interviews
    - Student-proposed projects (for instance, identify a workplace problem and apply course concepts to propose/create a solution)

Works Cited and Additional Resources

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