Establishing Teaching Presence in Online Instruction

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Abstract (10-25): Online instructors promote *teaching presence* at various levels. This presentation discusses a relationship between these levels of teaching presence and instructional strategies.

As e-learning has become more widespread, distance learners often experience an isolation effect as a result of learning in the perceived absence of their peers and instructor (Anderson, 2008; Gregor & Cuskelly, 1994). The community of inquiry (COI) framework was described by Anderson and associates to include three overlapping presences: cognitive, social , and teaching presences (Anderson, 2004). In this presentation we narrow our focus to teaching presence and how it is encouraged by the use of a variety of instructional and communications strategies employed by the instructor to minimize the isolation effect (Smith, Ferguson, & Caris, 2002).

Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, and Archer (2001) defined teaching presence as "the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educational worthwhile learning outcomes" (p. 5). This definition was developed in the "pioneering days" of online learning. However, communications technologies have matured to develop more effective learning environments, that are not simply text-based. Now teaching presence can take on a whole new meaning given narrated materials or even synchronous video conferencing. So a construct based text-based computer mediated communication was due a revision.

Today's communications technologies provide a wide variety of means by which an instructor establishes teaching presence. Multimedia research has shown that the use of narrated materials provide a case for social agency (Clark & Mayer, 2011) and that the principle of personalization helps narrated instructional messages promote an organic conversation where the role of the learner is an active participant, rather than merely a listener (Clark & Mayer, 2011; Paas, Renkl, & Sweller, 2003) . Individual technologies have advantages and disadvantages, but they are only means to promote learning. In this presentation we discuss four levels of teaching presence given today's instructional/communication strategies.

Two main factors change the nature of teaching presence within a course; whether the instruction is synchronous or asynchronous and, from a learning perspective, the modality, either audio or visual, or a combination of both. We propose several levels of teaching presence based upon the modality of learning and the instructional strategies used in establishing teaching presence.

Text provides the lowest level, or weakest form of teaching presence. For example, written text can convey a tone, personality, language choices and even something about the author, as reflected in the use or grammar, style and/or punctuation. It is this personality within the text that represents the instructor's presence. Instructors may be present this way in discussion board posts or email (Wise, Zhao, & Hausknecht, 2014), or in written presentations within the online course.

Instructors can raise the level of teaching presence within a course by including narrated instructional materials, which represent the second level of teaching presence. This level of communication allows for animated visuals, and a recorded version of the instructor themselves. Learners who used narrated materials performed significantly better on transfer tests than those using text-based instruction (Moreno & Mayer, 2004; Moreno, Mayer, Spires, & Lester, 2001). In narrated presentations the instructor's personality and affect can be communicated via the verbal or emotional tone of the recorded message. Examples of this are Articulate or Adobe Presenter presentations, or screen videos as in Camtasia, which students can review asynchronously. The teaching presence represented to the learners is not about the recording, but about the instructor's personality. It is the instructor's voice which is most relevant to the learner. So, for example, recordings of people other than the instructor do not promote instructor presence.

The next level of teaching presence may be attained when the instructor uses video as an instructional strategy during asynchronous instruction. For it is then that non-verbal cues may be communicated to the learner which is not possible in audio-only presentations. The instructor's facial expressions, demeanor, body posture, all contribute

to further the effectiveness of this form of instruction. It has also been argued that video provides nonverbal communication not available in narrated only materials. This nonverbal communication made a significant difference when supporting attitudinal instruction, but not procedural learning (Baylor & Kim, 2009). Videos could be used at the course level or the module level. Best practice suggests a course introduction video (Lewis, Moreno, & Large, 2009) and perhaps a conclusion video -commonly referred to as "outro". This visual presence of the instructor can make that instructor more real to the learner, giving them a face to the name.

Finally, the highest level of teacher presence is provided with the interactivity of synchronous video, because this allows the instructor to answer the student questions directly in real-time. Real-time synchronous interaction between instructor and students in online learning allows for the creation of a critical CoI, which is an essential context for higher-order learning. This synchronous interactivity adds a more natural social dimension to the interaction between learner and instructor in online learning, as it allows for communication to happen more fluently and naturally, in a similar way to the interaction that occurs in a face-to-face classroom.

Conclusions

The growth in online enrollments is now outpacing the growth of traditional education (Allen and Seaman 2010). Educators who embark in the creation of a critical community of inquiry using Computer Mediated Communication face major challenges, as effective learning requires meaningful interaction between students and teachers, and educational learning experiences are both collaborative and reflective (Garrison,

Anderson, & Archer, 2004). Teaching presence considers contributions of all participants

in promoting an active learning community (Vaughan & Garrison, 2005). Adding teaching

presence within a course is with the hope of motivating learners to learn. In order to create

an effective teaching presence, the educator has to design and organize the

teaching-learning experience by designing and implementing learning activities that foster

communication and interchange of ideas among students, between students and teacher,

and among students and the course content (Rourke, Anderson, Garrison, and Archer,

2001). Faculty can improve their level of presence within an environment by adding audio

or video elements (Lewis & Slapak-Barski, 2014). Adding synchronous components to a

learning environment can limit isolation effects.

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