Chapter 80

Leveraging Teaching Presence in Online Courses:
Strategies, Technology, and Student Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

The Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework has been widely used to guide the research and practice of online courses. In the CoI framework, three essential elements were identified to be critical for a successful online learning experience: social, cognitive, and teaching presences. While the three presences are overlapping and interdependent, teaching presence is known to be key to the creation of a community of inquiry by addressing cognitive and social issues. Starting with an overview of the CoI framework, this chapter mainly focuses on teaching presence and its two dimensions: instructional design and organization and directed facilitation. Specific strategies and examples for each dimension to leveraging teaching presence in a technology-rich online course are presented and described. In addition, a student's learning experience in the course is also shared to provide a student's perspective of the strategies.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter starts with an overview of the Community of Inquiry (CoI) theory, with a particular focus on teaching presence as one of the main elements of CoI. The paper then provides a review of the literature on different aspects of teaching presence, e.g., instructional design and organization, and directed facilitation. For each aspect, guidelines are drawn from the literature review, which are then illustrated and complemented with the authors' own experiences of teaching a technology-rich online course. Specific

strategies, examples, and enabling technologies are presented. In addition to illustrating the strategies from the perspective of the instructor who taught the course, the chapter provides a student's account of how she perceived and experienced the strategies. Further, quantitative data regarding students' perceptions of the community of inquiry in the illustrated course are reported to corroborate the description. The chapter ends with the instructor's concluding thoughts and reflections. The goal of this chapter is to present a set of strategies and technologies that can be used to establish and sustain teaching presence in an online course, thereby creating a community of learners.

BACKGROUND

Over the past decade, online education has been growing rapidly. Online courses have become prevalent in higher education. More than 70% of higher education institutions offer online courses, and over 95% of the institutions with 5,000 or more students deliver courses online (Allen & Seaman, 2015). Aslanian and Clinefelter (2012) regard online education as higher education's latest disruptive innovation, which forces colleges and universities to change the way they deliver courses. Pedagogical and technological innovations make it possible to create and deliver online education effectively and efficiently, which leads to the transformation of higher education (Garrison, 2011).

Although the year-to-year growth rate in the number of students taking online courses has been decreasing in the past few years, online education accounts for about 75% of the increase in overall higher education enrollment from 2012 to 2013 in the United States (Allen & Seaman, 2015). According to the 2014 Online Learning Consortium report, *Grade Change: Tracking Online Education in the United States* (Allen & Seaman, 2014), more than seven million students are taking at least one online course.

Colleges and universities see online learning as critical to their institutions' long-term strategy (Allen & Seaman, 2015). Academic leaders believe that the learning outcomes in online education are comparable to those in face-to-face instruction (Allen & Seaman, 2015). Empirical research also shows that distance education is as effective in learning outcomes as face-to-face instruction (Anglin & Morrison, 2000; Cavanaugh, Gillan, Kromrey, Hess, & Blomeyer, 2004; Dean, Stahl, Sylwester, & Peat, 2001).

Students take online courses mainly because online learning allows them to study anywhere at any time while still taking family and work responsibilities (Aslanian & Clinefelt, 2012). With the increasing demand to learn at distance and the fast development of the Internet and other emerging technologies, the growing trend in online learning is expected to continue (Dahlstrom, 2012; Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2012).

While the numbers of online courses and online students have grown, there are a number of concerns and barriers in online education, including the lack of faculty acceptance of online education, lower retention rate, and student readiness for online courses (Allen & Seaman, 2015). A significant number of faculty members in higher education, for example, do not tend to accept the value and legitimacy of online education. More importantly, delivering high quality online courses requires more faculty time and effort, but there are not enough time and resources to design and develop high quality online courses. Due to a lack of training for teaching online, faculty often have limited information and knowledge about what constitutes a successful online course, as well as limited frameworks that guide them to design and deliver an online learning environment.

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