

Chapter 1

The Community of Inquiry Framework, Online and Blended Learning, and the i²Flex Classroom Model

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ABSTRACT

The community of inquiry (CoI) framework was developed by researchers at the University of Alberta who were interested in exploring the learning that took place among participants in online discussions. Garrison, Anderson, and Archer grounded their thinking in Dewey's progressive epistemology which placed inquiry within a community of learners at the center of the educational experience. The CoI model they created conceptualizes learning in online environments as supported by three interacting presences – social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence. This chapter will describe the CoI framework, briefly review research supporting its efficacy in online course design and implementation, and explore how the framework can be applied to blended and online learning environments in general and the i²Flex model in particular.

INTRODUCTION

The Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework was developed by researchers at the University of Alberta who were interested in exploring the learning that took place among participants in online discussions. Randy Garrison, Terry Anderson, and Walter Archer (2000) grounded their thinking in John Dewey's (1933; 1938) progressive epistemology which placed inquiry within a community of learners at the center of the educational experience. In the twenty years since Garrison and his colleagues first shared their concept of the kinds of supports needed to develop a robust community of inquiry online, the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework has grown to inform research and practice in online and blended learning around the world. This chapter will describe the CoI framework, briefly review research supporting its

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efficacy in online course design and implementation, and explore how the framework can be applied to blended learning environments in general and the i²Flex model in particular (Avgerinou et al., 2014; Gialamas & Avgerinou, 2015).

After completing the chapter, readers will be able to describe the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework and the three presences – social, teaching and cognitive -- conceptualized as interacting to develop community in online and blended courses. They will be able to discuss research findings concerning the CoI framework and the survey designed to investigate student perceptions of the CoI presences in online and blended courses (Arbaugh et al., 2008). Readers will also be able to define blended learning and the Blending with Purpose model (Picciano, 2009) and to state Garrison and Vaughan's (2008) seven principles for blended learning. Finally, readers will be able to relate the concepts explored in the chapter to the design and teaching of i²Flex classes.

THE COMMUNITY OF INQUIRY FRAMEWORK

The Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework (Garrison et al., 2000; 2001) is a social collaborative model of the interactive processes that support learning in online and blended environments. It is a process model which assumes that effective online learning requires the development of a community (Hilliarda & Stewart, 2019; Rovai, 2002; Shea, 2006) that supports meaningful inquiry and deep learning. The CoI framework has been widely applied to inform both the research and practice of online learning worldwide, and an increasing body of research supports its efficacy (Arbaugh et al., 2008; Dempsey & Jang, 2019; Lawa et al., 2019; Swan et al., 2009).

Building from the notion of social presence in online discussion (Gunawardena, 1995), the CoI framework represents the online learning experience as a function of the relationship between three presences: social, cognitive, and teaching. The concept of “presence” here is in some sense functional and purposively applied to indicate that the presences should not be conceived as attached to actors but rather can emanate from any of the participants or even the materials in an online or blended course (Swan et al., 2009). The CoI framework suggests that online learning is located at the intersection of these three presences, and that all three presences are necessary for learning to take place (Figure 1).

In the three sections which follow, the role of each of the presences in the CoI framework is described, relevant research findings concerning it summarized, and the practical implications of the latter explored.

Social Presence

The concept of social presence derives from the work of communications theorists (Short et al., 1976) who argued that differing media had differing capacities to transmit “social presence,” or the “salience of the other person in [an interpersonal] interaction” (p. 65). Short et al. moreover suggested that computer-mediated communication had the least such capacity and so was a poor medium for teaching and learning. Educators using online discussion boards, however, found that many of their students felt online discussion was more personal than traditional classroom discussion and thus argued that social presence was more a matter of individual perception than an objective quality of the medium. Gunawardena and Zittle (1997), for example, defined social presence as “the degree to which a person is perceived as ‘real’ in mediated communication” (p. 8).

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