# Creating Presence in Your Online Course

Developing a community of inquiry include three perspectives on the presence in online courses that fulfill the educational experience for learners (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2001) include the following:

**Social Presence** is the ability of participants to identify with the community (e.g., course of study), communicate purposefully in a trusting environment, and develop inter-personal relationships by way of promoting their personalities.

**Cognitive Presence** is the extent to which learners can construct and confirm meaning through sustained reflection and discourse.

**Teaching Presence**  is the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes to realize personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes.

**SOCIAL PRESENCE**

One specific strategy that creates a social presence in an online course, when facilitating discussions, is a well structure discussion question. This strategy will start by allowing learners to use their knowledge and comprehension of the subject at the higher levels of Bloom’s Taxonomy cognitive domain, which includes the application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. For instance, below is a discussion question on conflict resolution in the Leadership and Team Development course I facilitate:

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**Team Projects**

An example of a specific strategy that I use when facilitating team or group projects and how this strategy creates a social presence in the course, I facilitate a capstone course, Strategic Management, for the BAS program in Supervision and Management degree at my institution. This course includes a semester-long business simulation, with virtual teams leading a global business enterprise as co-manage of the leadership team. The teams make over fifty strategic business decisions, in all functions weekly. The activity is a real-world application that provides learners the opportunity to work collaboratively, which often leads to interpersonal relationships. Learners have clearly defined roles with clearly defined tasks as co-managers. The teams are provided two practice weeks, in the beginning, to adjust to the simulation and each other. Learners gain the skills to work with team members at a distance effectively, which is a valuable skill needed in the real world of business. The simulation is challenging with many considerations. It makes me so proud to know that our learners have the talent to make a significant impact in the direction of strategic business operations.

**Peer Reviews**

Effective peer reviews help to build social presence and develop inter-personal relationships. Here is an example of a peer review strategy I use when facilitating peer reviews and how this strategy creates social presence. The criteria, I use for a peer review assignment include the grading rubric that is associated with the assignment. Also, a list of detailed peer review questions is offered that make clear how the peer reviewer should address the review. A good way to offer the peer review is to have learners self-select whose paper they wish to review. Learners can request a peer review by posting their draft paper on a discussion board, while other learners respond by selecting a draft paper to review. What I really like about effective learner peer reviews is that not only does the feedback help the learner receiving the feedback, the learner reviewing can reflect on his/her own work from a different perspective. This learner-to-learner interaction strengthens opportunities to develop social presence, build higher order thinking and problem-solving skills. Learners share different perspectives and challenge one another’s thinking.

**Gamification**

Another fun and effective method to develop a social presence in an online course is gamification. Teams of learners can create a virtual game as a teach-back on a portion of the chapter reading, an exciting activity. Engagement and active learning can be deep learning, which communicates a trusting environment that develops inter-personal relationships.

**COGNITIVE PRESENCE**

The following are cognitive presence strategies I offer in my online courses:

**Cognitive Presence Strategy #1**: Pedagogical Approach to Critical Thinking (Elder & Paul, 2010)

**How this strategy will create cognitive presence in a course:**

This strategy will create a cognitive presence in courses by utilizing Elder and Paul’s (2010) set of intellectual standards in combination with the elements of thought. To improve learners’ critical thinking skills that question the value of the information and ideas and determine acceptability, probing questions are asked to move learners from surface-level thinking to deep, critical thinking. This approach can be used with both discussion boards and written assignments.

Questions based on the standards help learners’ to think critically. The Elder and Paul (2010) questions with slight modifications are as follows:

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| **Clarity Questions** | * Would you elaborate further? * Would you illustrate what you meant? * Would you provide us with an example? |
| **Accuracy Questions** | * How could we check on that? * How could we find out if that is true? * How could we verify or test that? |
| **Precision Questions** | * Would you be more specific? * Would you provide us with more details? * Would you be more exact? |
| **Relevance Questions** | * How does that relate to the problem? * How does that bear on the question? * How does that help us with the issue? |
| **Depth Questions** | * What factors make this a difficult problem? * What are some of the complexities of this question? * What are some of the difficulties we need to deal with? |
| **Breadth Questions** | * Do we need to look at this from another perspective? * Do we need to consider another point of view? * Do we need to look at this in other ways? |
| **Logic Questions** | * Does all of this make sense together? * Does the first paragraph fit in with the last paragraph? * Does that statement follow from the evidence? |
| **Significance Questions** | * Is this the most important problem to consider? * Is this the central idea to focus on? * Which of these facts are most important? |
| **Fairness Questions** | * Do others have a stake in this issue? * Is this sympathetically representing the viewpoint of others? |

**Cognitive Presence Strategy #2**: Active Learning with Videos (Moore, 2013)

**How this strategy will create cognitive presence in a course:**

This active learning strategy is placing the responsibility of learning on the learner. Having learners select videos to supports defends, opposes, or evaluates learners’ position is an effective method to strengthen online research skills while driving conceptual understanding. This active learning strategy includes real-world issues, which adds another layer of the higher-order thinking process to this activity.

Steps to increase the educational effectiveness of an online course with video (Moore, 2013):

1. Assign a video about a real-world issue about the topic at hand.
2. Have students locate online and present to the class a second video that (supports, defends, opposes, elaborates, etc.) the original video. If students need scaffolding to complete this exercise, provide guidelines for searching the Web and vetting sources.
3. Use students “found” videos as the basis for class discussion. Ask students to comment, via the discussion board, on how well the clips shared by their classmates met the selected criterion.

**Cognitive Presence Strategy #2**: Self-reflective questioning (Stavredes, 2011).

**How this strategy will create cognitive presence in a course:**

Reflection allows learners to consider where they have been, where they are, and where they should go. Self-reflective learners are in control of their learning, which leads to a plan for continuous improvement. Learners see both areas of growth and areas that require additional attention. A practical self-reflection questioning approach allows learners, a) to consider course goals and learning objectives, b) determine their current level of achievement, and c) identify areas to focus their attention on. This approach can be put into practice in the discussion board and can help learners self-direct and set personal goals for learning. Learners reflect on activities, see growth, and set goals for areas of improvement.

Questions based on Stavredes (2011) Self-Reflective Strategy are as follows:

**At the beginning of the course**

* Why did I take this course?
* What did I hope to gain from taking this course?
* How will this course help me in the real world?
* On a scale from 1-10, my current knowledge and skill level in relationship to the learning objectives of the course?
* What learning objective will I need to focus more attention and effort?
* What are my academic strengths?
* What are my academic weaknesses?
* What type of support will I need from the instructor to help me gain additional academic skills?

**As Learners Complete Major Activities and Assignments in the Course**

* What did I learn from this activity?
* What confuses me?
* Where do I need to spend more time on concepts?
* What knowledge and skills did I use to complete the activities?
* What knowledge and skills do I need more focus?
* What strategy did I use to make sure that I understood the requirements of the activity?
* What strategy did I use to break down the components associated with the activity?
* What strategy did I use to ensure I remained on task?
* What strategy did I use to ensure I was learning?
* What strategy did I use when I was not sure about what to do or when I needed clarification or elaboration to understand something?
* What was the most enjoyable part of the activity?
* What was the least enjoyable part of the activity?
* How could the activity be improved?

**At the End of the Course**

* Consider your rating of the course learning objectives at the beginning of the course. Rate your level of knowledge and skills for each learning objective at the end of the course.
* What objectives were you most successful at achieving?
* What objectives do you need to continue to develop?
* What strategy did you use throughout the course to ensure you understood the course content and associated activities?
* What strategy did you use to ensure you met the criteria of the assignments?
* What academic skills did you use to successfully complete the course?
* What academic skills do you need to work on to improve your learning?
* What did you enjoy most about this course?
* What did you enjoy least about this course?
* How could this course be improved?

**INSTRUCTOR PRESENCE** (Teaching Presence) – Pedagogical Approach

It is essential to maintain motivation throughout the course. A strategy I use to encourage participation in the online courses includes starting strong with enthusiasm with a positive perspective, which goes a long way. With a focus on interaction, I post a video introduction in the Introductions discussion forum that includes both professional and personal information. I Instruct learners to do the same. I also reply to each learner individually by video post while commenting on something the learner mentioned, which is a beautiful way to make each learner feel special and welcomed in the course and helps to establish a personal relationship between the instructor and the learner. I have found that creating a personal relationship and is quite effective in building rapport between instructors and learners. Learners understand that a real person, who acknowledges them, is present in the course. Instructor-to-learner interaction is a critical component of learner satisfaction.

**Monitoring Learners**

Monitor the progress of individual learner activity, keep track of individual learner progress, and gauge learner performance weekly is critical to maintaining social presence. This monitoring provides the opportunity to find learners who are behind or struggling in the course. The instructor can swiftly communicate with the learner and provide feedback to help overcome issues. Learners understand the problems and provided opportunities to improve performance. This strategy conveys to the learner that the instructor is actively monitoring the progress of the learner and concerned about their success in the course.

**Knowledge Construction**

A strategy I use to encourage knowledge construction and critical thinking in the online courses is to structure discussion posts, so there is more than one answer. I, as the instructor, facilitate and share knowledge by the use of prompts, elaboration, clarification, weaving, perspectives, inferences, or assumptions, implications, and summaries (Stavredes, 2011). For instance, if a learner’s line of reasoning is difficult to follow, a request to restate the response differently may help to flesh out ideas to provide clarity. The engagement with knowledge construction and critical thinking creates active learning. This strategy helps the learner to realize that the instructor is committed to maintaining the interest, motivation, and engagement of learners.

Knowledge Construction Chart – Adapted from Stavredes (2011).

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| Prompts | * I have been monitoring the forum and have not seen any posts, so I wanted to give you a little more information to get you started. Consider the following elements as you compose your discussion response this week [list elements]. For example … * Consider the following scenario [to put the discussion in context] … * Let me give you a concrete example … * From my experience, an example to help you understand the concept is … |
| Elaboration | * You have a great start on the discussion this week. Can you elaborate on your thoughts and ideas and consider the following in your response [list areas where learner has not responded fully to the discussion question? |
| Clarification | * I appreciate your comments about … * Can you clarify your response, so we can clearly thoughts and ideas? * Can you provide an illustration or example? * Can you state this in a different way? * I appreciate your comment; however, I am unclear how this relates to the discussion question. Can you provide more information to help us see the connection to the topic we are discussing this week? |
| Weaving | * I really appreciate the multiple perspectives on the issue we are discussing this week. John, Sue, and Nancy believe … while Paul, Jerry, and Carrie believe … * How do you reconcile the different views? * Is there compelling evidence to support one view over the other? * Are there other ways of viewing this issue that have not been considered? * For example, in my experience … * One aspect of the readings that has not been discussed is … What impact does this have? |
| Off-Topic Weaving | * I really appreciate the points that have been on the issue including … it appears that some of the points do not relate specifically to this topic such as …, so please be sure that you consider … as you discuss the topic to ensure that all of your comments help us develop a deeper understanding of the topic or issue. |
| Perspectives | * Consider the following alternative scenario … How would this influence your view of the issue? * According to … there is another side to this issue. They cite … as evidence for their perspective. How does this information fit with your perspective on the issue? * Is there another way of looking at this perspective from a different lens? What if you were faced with …? What would you do if … occurred? How would you feel if …? From my experience, I have found … |
| Inferences and Assumptions | * Can you discuss the specific inferences and assumptions you are making from this perspective? * For this to be true, then … would also have to be true. Have you considered this? * For this to be true, then you must also believe that … * What evidence do you have to support the inferences and assumptions you are making? * What inferences and assumptions does the author make to lead to his/her conclusions? |
| Implications | * Can you discuss the implications of your line of reasoning on this issue? * If this is true, how will this influence the present conditions? What will that mean for the future? * If this is true, what actions must be taken today? In the future? * What groups will this line of reasoning affect? |

**Communication Feedback**

Providing prompt, clear, and concise feedback about grading assignments based on criteria in the grading rubric is helpful to learners. Beginning with a compliment on the learner’s strength(s) and ending with a note of confidence that the learner will improve their performance and complete the activities. The feedback is helpful because learners are interested in knowing how they are doing in the course. This strategy provides the learner with information that the instructor is concerned about the successful performance of the learner. Learners are interested in knowing how they are doing in the course. Again, this strategy provides the learner with information that the instructor is concerned about the successful performance of the learner.

**Feedback Response Plan:**

**Q&A Forum on the Discussion Board**

Communicating feedback on performance in online courses is essential to developing social presence in an online course. There is a Q&A Forum on the discussion board. For questions related to the course, please post all questions related to the course in the Q&A before messaging me. Three are no dumb questions. Chances are another learner who has the same problem, and everyone can see the answer at the same time. If someone knows the answer to a question before I reply, please share your response with your peers. Sharing information is a team effort. I will always check the Q&A form first after logging into the course. Inspired by Vandervelde (2018). Please message me directly with any personal or grade questions.

**Email Response Time**

Canvas Message is the preferred method of communication about grades or personal topics.

I will answer Canvas messages within 24 hours Monday - Friday.

**Assignment Response Time**

You must receive feedback as quickly as possible and in time to process and include the feedback for the next assignment. I will respond with feedback and a grade within 48 hours Monday – Friday from the assignment due date.

**Office Hours**

I make myself available for individual one-on-one meetings during online office hours Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday from 8:00 – 10:00 AM. Please message me through Canvas to schedule an appointment outside office hours.

**Adjustments to the Plan**

In the event of an emergency, when the plan cannot follow its course, post an announcement, and message learners that the instructor will be offline for X number of hours. Learners should be considerate of the instructor because the instructor is considerate of learners who have emergencies.

**Institution’s Policy of Response Time**

The policy on response time to email and phone messages is 24 hours and 48 hours Monday-Friday to return assignments.

**Self-Directedness**

A communication strategy to encourage self-directedness in online courses is dependent on the learner’s stage of learning development. There are four stages of self-directedness (Grow, 1996): Stage 1: Dependent learner, Stage 2: Lack of confidence and motivation, Stage 3: Confident and motivated, and Stage 4: Self-directed. Note: The examples of instruction modified by Stavredes (2011). These instructional strategies will help the dependent learner become more independent. Also, help to find ways to enhance independence, Stage 4 learners, allowing them the freedom to work independently. The dialog between instructor and learners diminished the learners’ feeling of isolation and helps them persist. Thus, learners develop a relationship with the instructor and feel a sense of connection.

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| Stages of Self-Directedness | Examples of Instruction |
| Stage 1: Dependent Learner | * Learners require more frequent feedback to let them know how they are doing and if they are meeting your expectations. * Feedback should include prompts to help dependent learners become more independent. * Include a process for overcoming roadblocks as they engage in learning activities, including road maps, checklists, due date document, outlines, rubrics, and any other resources available to support a dependent learner. |
| Stage 2: Lack of Confidence and Motivation | * Be encouraging and acknowledge that the learners’ willingness and enthusiasm for learning will help them be successful. * Help learners build their confidence so that they can accomplish the objectives of the course. * Help learners expand on explanations and encourage learners to review their work before submitting it for grading. * Encourage learners to ask questions early on instead of struggling with activities and assignments; this can help alleviate frustration and stress from not being sure of the requirements or the activities |
| Stage 3: Confident and Motivated | * Help learners expand their thinking by having them explore higher levels of thinking on the subject. * Help learners apply their understanding in novel ways |
| Stage 4: Self-Directed | * Provide specific feedback on learners’ assignments that points out excellence and why it is excellent. * Help learners self-evaluate their performance to enhance critical thinking skills and determine any gaps in learning. From the self-evaluation, they can develop a plan to fill any gaps to continue to build their knowledge and skills. |

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**Resources**

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