Creating Presence in Your Online Course: Instructor Presence Plan

The article How and Why to Humanize Your Online Class, presented in this module, explained four principles of humanizing the online environment and offered examples of interactions related to creating instructor presence in online courses. Based on what you read and the resources shared in the Instructor Presence Resources Forum, for each principle describe at least one strategy you would use in the online courses you teach, why you would use this particular strategy, and how this strategy will create instructor presence in your course.

Your response should include explicit references to the resources presented in this module. Properly cite all sources with the author or owner name, date of publication, resource title, if supplied, and URL or source (such as publisher).

Interactions to Encourage Trust

Describe at least one strategy you would use to encourage trust in the online courses you teach.

As recommended by Pacansky-Brock (2020), I would share a struggle I worked through related to the course topic. For instance, I created an online dance course last year in which I shared how there are certain steps in that style that I learned in my first class which still don't feel completely natural to me after 16 years of study. I keep working on them.

Why would you use this strategy?

It's important for students to understand that it's ok not to be perfect and that perfection won't be expected of them. With attention to and effort in an area of learning, they can make successful (albeit imperfect) progress.

How would this strategy create instructor presence in your course?

In his video about instructor presence, Proffitt (2016) asserted the following: "Instructor presence is all about communication: how often you communicate, how well you communicate, and how dependable that communication is." I believe that the four principles of humanizing the online environment—trust, authentic presence, awareness, and empathy (Pacansky-Brock, 2020) – all fall into Proffitt's category of communicating well.

In the case of trust, communicating well comes in the form of demonstrating "selective vulnerability" (Hammond, 2014, as cited in Pacansky-Brock, 2020). Students can't trust a computerized course. There's no emotional investment into the student in that scenario. But a real person teaching an online course who shows trust in students by sharing the not-so-perfect aspects of their life is someone who can then be trusted to help students overcome their own educational and related personal challenges.

Interactions to Encourage Authentic Presence

Describe at least one strategy you would use to encourage authentic presence in the online courses you teach.

In my business, I have often used a software called Loom (https://www.loom.com/) that allows me to record video of my screen, face (if desired), and speech and then quickly email these video messages to clients. I would use this same communication method to give feedback in online courses.

Why would you use this strategy?

Loom videos would provide authentic, unscripted feedback in my own voice, showing my own face, and displaying students' own work. And as an added benefit, it is much faster (at least for me) to record a Loom video than to laboriously type out an email explaining the same concepts.

How would this strategy create instructor presence in your course?

Continuing with Proffitt's concept of communicating well, these types of "brief, imperfect videos" would "add context to [my] communications" and let students know that I am "in this journey with them" (Costa, 2020, as cited in Pacansky-Brock, 2020). While the videos would be extemporaneous and less polished than more formal written versions of the same information, the recordings would undeniably add more of my authentic presence to a course.

Interactions to Raise Awareness of Students as Individuals

Describe at least one strategy you would use to raise awareness of your students as individuals in the online courses you teach.

I would have a personal introduction discussion board activity right at the beginning of a course. I would reply to every student individually and by name with a reaction to some aspect of their introduction. I would also require students to read and reply to a certain number of their classmates' posts. The exact form of the introduction, like the specific personal questions I would ask students to answer, could vary from semester to semester.

Why would you use this strategy?

I know this is a commonly used strategy, but it is ubiquitous because it's a good way of establishing care for the individual, personalized contact, and student active participation from the get-go.

How would this strategy create instructor presence in your course?

This strategy would exemplify communicating well by displaying my desire to "learn about who [my] students are and how [I] can support them" (Pacansky-Brock, 2020). It would quickly raise my awareness of student individuality and allow me to show my commitment to responding to them as unique and valuable people.

Interactions to Encourage Empathy

Describe at least one strategy you would use to encourage empathy in the online courses you teach.

In my syllabus or other introductory materials, I would include a serious plea for students to let me know if they are struggling in some way (with the course materials, with life experiences, etc.) and express my ardent desire to help them through these challenges to a successful course outcome.

Why would you use this strategy?

When I got my bachelor's degree, I was young and able to really focus on my education. I had some learning challenges here and there but nothing too difficult. However, when I got my master's degree, I had to fit in my education around commitments to my family and my business. I struggled with staying on top of schoolwork when the family and business needs were especially high. It meant the world to me when I was met with empathy instead of recrimination during these times. I am forever grateful for faculty who knew I was trying my best, encouraged me to keep going, and provided some flexibility so I could meet my school requirements while juggling everything else. I would like to provide that same kind of empathy to others.

How would this strategy create instructor presence in your course?

The humanizing principle of expressing empathy is a form of communicating well and thereby creating instructor presence because it is about recognizing people in their specific circumstances "without judgment, be[ing] flexible, and support[ing] them towards their goals" (Pacansky-Brock, 2020). This is individualized care built on unique teacher-student relationships.

References

Proffitt, J. (2016, May 20). *Online instructional design: Instructor presence* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eOHCJGN-_mo

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Creating Presence In Your Online Course: Social Presence Plan

The Module 3 reading, Learners' Needs and a Neglected Component of the Community of Inquiry Framework, outlined three broad strategies related to creating a social presence in online courses: instructor persona, course design, and online communication. Answer the questions below for each of the three broad strategies.

Your response should include explicit references to the module reading and other resources presented in this module. Properly cite all sources with the author or owner name, date of publication, resource title, if supplied, and URL or source (such as publisher).

Instructor Persona

Describe at least one specific strategy that could be used when developing an instructor persona and how this strategy creates a social presence in the course.

Online learners can struggle without direct contact to other students and their instructor, and one way that instructors can ameliorate student feelings of isolation and disconnection is by "show[ing] [their] presence and offer[ing] enough opportunities for socialization in a trusting environment to enhance the learning process" (Quality Matters, n.d.). Within the Community of Inquiry Framework, social presence is "the ability of participants 'to project their personal characteristics into the community, thereby presenting themselves to other participants as 'real people''" (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000, p. 89, as cited in Richardson & Lowenthal, 2017, p. 86). According to Richardson and Lowenthal, "one of the first steps to establishing instructor social presence in online courses is finding ways to establish one's personality—or…persona." (2017, p. 92). Richardson and Lowenthal continued that persona/personality "includes those things that make one unique—that is, things that make one appear 'real.' Students want to get a sense of who their instructor is as a person" (p. 92).

One way to "project…personal characteristics" and "make one appear 'real'" according to Richardson and Lowenthal is for instructors to post a biography with "personal but relevant information" and a recent picture (2017, p. 92). I believe that video takes this biographical directive a step further in the right direction, especially video of instructors in everyday situations sharing their thoughts and their lives, as demonstrated by Pacansky-Brock (2019). This practice opens a "window" into the world of online instructors and allows their students to see them being "real people."

Do you anticipate creating an instructor persona in the online courses you teach? Why or why not?

As an instructional designer, I anticipate helping others create an instructor persona. But if I did teach a course, I would enjoy creating unscripted videos. I find them a much more casually authentic way to share glimpses of life than writing.

Course Design

Describe at least one specific strategy that could be used in course design and how this strategy creates a social presence in the course.

Richardson and Lowenthal (2017, p. 92) pointed out that "instructor social presence begins at the course design phase of an online course" and that "it is important, whenever possible, to design courses that reflect not only your personality but also, most importantly, your own instructional values (Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2013.)"

Considering this description of course design's importance for expressing instructor persona, I appreciated Richardson and Lowenthal's advice to "add humor when appropriate (e.g., post content-related comic strips) (see Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997; Rourke et al., 1999; Sung & Mayer 2012; Wise et al. 2004)" (p. 93). For instructors and designers, who, like myself, very much appreciate a comic strip, meme, or silly video, this seems like an appropriate step to take (of course, with deference to subject matter). I think of how many people I've heard refer to memes as a new "love language"—one that "moves at the speed of the internet" (Paoletta, 2019)—and I can't help but believe that there are students who would feel seen with the inclusion of a bit of humor, too. In fact, I had one course during my online master's degree program in which the instructor shared a few comic strips, and while I don't remember the comic strip content, I do recall thoughts of having found a "kindred spirit." This instructor did prove to be my favorite in the program, too.

Do you anticipate using course design to create a social presence in the online courses you teach? Why or why not?

As an instructional designer, I answer with a definitive yes! When I have created educational materials for small business SMEs in the past, I have greatly enjoyed finding ways to include aspects of their personalities into the course materials. And while higher education courses are a bit more formal than small business ones, people are still people and find other people interesting, by and large. So inasmuch as it were appropriate and possible to make these types of design decisions, I would do so. And if I were designing a course for use by multiple instructors, I would think about providing opportunities for the injection of each instructor's unique personality in discussions, feedback, and announcements.

Online Communication

Describe at least one specific strategy that could be used in online communications with students and how this strategy creates a social presence in the course.

In the words of Richardson and Lowenthal (2017), "Communicating with students during a course is still the number one way that instructors establish their instructor social presence" (p. 93). It's simple, and it's true. Direct communications with instructors give a better read on their personalities than anything else. With "Professor Comic Strip," I knew I liked her from her instructional videos in the course, I thought I had found a kindred spirit with her inclusions of humor, and I was confirmed in my positivity about her when we exchanged emails on course topics and I found her to be incredibly helpful.

I've used a tool for several years in my business called Loom (https://www.loom.com). It's a screen recording software that specializes in email communication. It has been immensely helpful in my dealings with clients, as I have been able to actively show something on my screen while talking about it (I can include simultaneous video of myself in a small window at the bottom of the screen if I want), quickly pop the video into an email, and send it off. I believe that this tool would be amazing for use by course instructors in establishing social presence, as it would allow them to have an assignment submission or email question on screen, speak feedback while having their faces recorded for verbal and nonverbal cues, and easily send these personalized responses to students' inboxes. Additionally, Loom

could be used in forums as it provides a link at which a video message can be viewed, and that link could be included in a discussion post. Loom also automatically provides closed captions with paid plans, making it accessible to hearing impaired students.

Do you anticipate using online communication strategies to create a social presence in the online courses you teach? Why or why not?

If I taught a course, I would absolutely use Loom. It greatly increases social presence in the key area of online communication, and it's faster than typing out detailed responses, too. I would also highly recommend this tool for instructors with whom I might work as a designer. Loom also has a free version which students in a course could use in email communications and discussion posts, as well.

Other

What other strategies do you anticipate using to create a social presence in the online courses you teach?

Since awareness of the issues around instructor social presence varies, I think it might be helpful to put together a dossier or quick overview of some kind for SMEs with whom I work on the subject. Then instructors would be better informed about why we might want to make certain decisions or use certain tools to foster increased social presence for themselves and their students. In fact, maybe it should be a Loom video with a meme included as an example of the unscripted, humorous video communication that is possible.

References:

Pacanski-Brock, M. (2015, November 15). *Social presence – why it's important in online courses* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GsjHaUc5vWg

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Creating Presence in Your Online Course: Cognitive Presence Plan

In this module, you've encountered strategies for creating cognitive presence in the module reading, in additional materials included in the module lesson, and from your colleagues in the forum. Based on these multiple sources of information and any additional research you might choose to conduct, describe at least three strategies you would use in the online courses you teach and how these strategies will create cognitive presence in your course.

Your response should include explicit references to at least one of the resources presented in this module. Properly cite all sources with the author or owner name, date of publication, resource title, if supplied, and URL or source (such as publisher).

These answers assume this definition of cognitive presence: "the extent to which participants in any particular configuration of a community of inquiry are able to construct meaning through sustained communication" (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2001, as cited in Quality Matters, n.d.).

Description of Cognitive Presence Strategy #1: Problem-based Learning

I create asynchronous, non-cohort courses and educational materials for adults on small business and personal enrichment topics. Because of this, I focus on learning strategies that do not require learners to be in the course at the same time and that are interesting for adults. Problem-based learning is one such learning strategy. According to the University of Florida Center for Instructional Technology and Training (n.d.), "Problem-based learning is a method of teaching where students are presented with a real or realistic problem, such as a case study or hypothetical situation, and use inductive reasoning to learn both information about the topic and how to think critically about it."

    How will this strategy create cognitive presence in your course?

A problem-based strategy "encourages self-directed learning through the exploration of complex, open-ended problems where the instructors facilitate and guide rather than teach" (University of Florida, n.d.). Garrison et al.'s model of the stages of practical inquiry (2000, as cited in Barnes, 2016) could also apply with phases of a triggering event, exploration, integration, and resolution. As an example, I could trigger learning by asking students to examine a business and make recommendations for best next steps for the business to take. The learners could then explore the case of business X: a description of what it does, who it serves, the processes it has in place, how it generates money, what its expenses are, etc. Integration could occur as the learners made sense of business X's information and applied knowledge from the course and their past experiences. Submitting a next steps business plan for instructor feedback could then wrap up the stages of practical inquiry with resolution. Thus, the student would engage in self-directed learning on an open-ended problem to create meaning with instructor guidance.

Description of Cognitive Presence Strategy #2: Use of Web-based Tools

Riggs and Linder (2016) advocate for the use of web-based tools to actively engage students in asynchronous online classes: "Given the limitations of typical LMS, a quick and easy option for using active learning pedagogy in the online asynchronous class is to employ the use of ready-made, web-based tools that are built for engagement but are located outside of the LMS" (p.5).

How will this strategy create cognitive presence in your course?

The incorporation of such outside tools allows for project-based learning, which is an excellent way to allow adults in a community of inquiry to create meaning. Employing Garrison et al.'s stages of practical inquiry again, I could trigger learning with an assignment to create a simple website through the free tier of service from companies like Wix or Weebly. Students could explore the necessary preparation materials and then integrate that information with a desired website topic to create a website plan. Finally, students could implement the plan and build the website for resolution. This is another example of self-directed, teacher-facilitated meaning construction that would provide cognitive presence.

Description of Cognitive Presence Strategy #3: Online Scavenger Hunt

The use of an online scavenger hunt is a colleague's idea from this module's discussion board (Boerngen, 2022). I want to explore how I might adapt the strategy to the type of courses I currently create. For these courses, a scavenger hunt would have to be completed individually and without competition.

How will this strategy create cognitive presence in your course?

The use of a scavenger hunt could have learners creating meaning with an open-ended task along these lines. An assignment of the scavenger hunt could be the triggering event, followed by exploration of the hunt requirements. Integration could be the search itself, at which time students could combine what they had learned about websites with examples of those principles being actively applied in real-life situations. Resolution could come in the form of reporting on the findings. A specific example of an online scavenger hunt for small business owners could take the form of the following:

Find and take screenshots of these website features. All screenshots must be from different websites, and all websites must be "G-rated" (as in no adult content or images). Place the screenshots in the provided document and submit it. If you have questions, post them in this module's Q&A forum.

1. Website with a centered logo in the header
2. Website with a drop-down menu from the header
3. Website with a menu in the footer
4. Website with a sidebar
5. Website with a company mission statement on the home page
6. Website with pricing tables
7. Website with an integrated calendar
8. Website with a gallery
9. Website with an email marketing sign-up

References

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