

Chapter 2

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

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ABSTRACT

The Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework was developed by researchers interested in exploring learning in online discussions who grounded their thinking in social constructivist notions of inquiry-based teaching and learning. The i²Flex approach is similarly grounded in social constructivism and inquiry, thus it makes sense to explore the CoI framework with the hope of informing i²Flex models. The purpose of this chapter is to do so. The chapter summarizes the way the CoI framework is conceptualized as developing from the interaction of three presences, and reviews research on the effects of each presence on teaching and learning. The development and validation of a CoI survey and some of the research it has enabled is also discussed. In particular, the chapter examines a course redesign project that significantly improved learning outcomes in four online courses which seems ideally suited the ongoing development of i²Flex classes. The chapter concludes with an examination of two other frameworks for structuring blended learning that might be applicable to i²Flex classes.

INTRODUCTION

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

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work, briefly review research supporting its 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, Gialamas, & Tsoukia, 2014; Gialamas & Avgerinou, 2015).

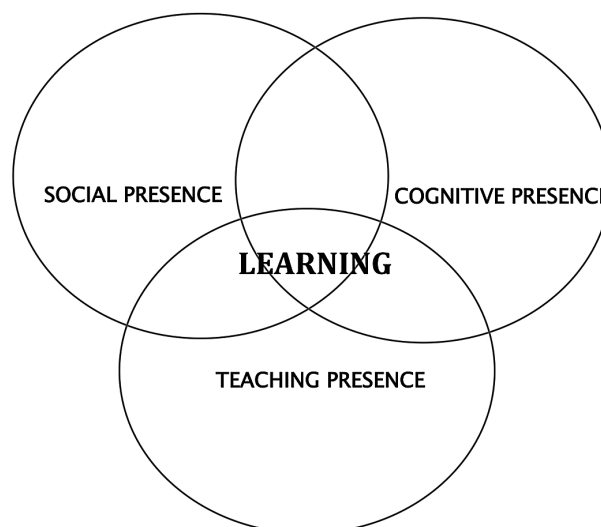
After completing the chapter, readers will be able to describe the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework and the three presences conceptualized as interacting to develop community in online and blended courses. They will be able to discuss research on the CoI framework and generally describe the CoI survey. 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, Anderson, & Archer, 2000; 2001) is a social-constructivist representation of the processes that support the development of a community and learning in online and blended classes and programs. The CoI framework has been widely used to inform research and practice in online learning, and an increasing body of research supports its efficacy for describing and informing online learning (Arbaugh, Cleveland-Innes, Diaz, Garrison, Ice, Richardson, & Swan, 2008; Swan, Garrison, & Richardson, 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 are not attached to actors but can be assumed by any of the participants or even the materials in an online or blended course. The CoI framework suggests that online learning is located at the intersection of these three presences; that is, all three presences are necessary for learning in an educational context to take place (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The community of inquiry framework
(Adapted from Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2001)



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