Chapter 3
Tensions between Cognitive and Social Presence in Blended K–12 Classes:
Conflicts and Techniques for Alignment

Beth Rubin
Miami University of Ohio, USA

Ron Fernandes
DePaul University, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter takes the perspective of the teacher as the leader of a blended K-12 classroom, working to create a community of inquiry. There is an inherent tension between the teacher/class leader encouraging social presence, while simultaneously maximizing cognitive presence and higher order thinking for students. Teachers differentiate among students in order to maximize learning for students of different ability levels, which can create either intentional or accidental groups that develop a sense of identity and hold different perceptions of the class and the teacher. The reduces social presence within the class by encouraging inter-group differentiation, which impedes the free and open inquiry needed for high levels of cognitive presence for all students. The use of social media to enhance the relationships and trust among all students, as well as the use of alternative groupings, are potential solutions that enhance class-level social presence and contribute to higher levels of learning for all.

INTRODUCTION

i²Flex (or isquareFlex) is an innovative learning methodology pioneered by the American Community School of Athens (ACS Athens) for K-12 learning. It utilizes technology to provide a unique blend of web-based with face-to-face teaching and learning in order to provide students with 21st century skills through learning experiences that are flexible with respect to time, place and technology (Avgerinou, Gialamas, & Tsoukia, 2014). Also important to the methodology is Morfosis, an ethos-specific and har-

monious educational experience, for which i²Flex serves as a vehicle, as well as educational leadership grounded in partnerships with teachers (Gialamas & Avgerinou, 2015).

One of the most important perspectives on understanding technology-supported learning, such as i²Flex, is the Community of Inquiry model (Rourke & Kanuka, 2009). The core of this model holds that:

Deep and meaningful learning… takes place in a community of inquiry composed of instructors and learners as the key participants in the educational process. The model assumes that in this community, learning occurs through the interaction of three core components: cognitive presence, teaching presence, and social presence. (Rourke, Anderson, Garrison, & Archer, 2001, pp. 2-3)

Teaching presence is the extent to which the course instructor designs learning experiences, guides and directs student work, and facilitates interaction to support deep learning (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison & Archer, 2001; Arbaugh & Hwang, 2006; Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007; Shea, Pickett & Pelz 2004; Rovai, 2007). Akyol and Garrison (2011) referred to it as the provision of "leadership through the course of study" (p. 235). This concept has expanded from its original focus on the design and support of discourse in asynchronous discussions to include the design of all learning activities and the provision of feedback (Arbaugh & Hwang, 2006; Kupczynski, Ice, Weisenmayer & McClusky, 2010).

Social presence refers to the sense of emotional connection and group identity that students perceive; it includes the three components of open communication with others in the course, cohesion and identification with the group, and affective expression (Akyol & Garrison, 2010; Rourke, et al., 2001). This construct has evolved over the past fourteen years, moving from an emphasis on immediacy, projecting a sense of "self" into the digital space, and developing emotional connection and open communication (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997; Rourke, et al., 2001; Swan, 2002) to focus more on educational goals and behaviors. It is now believed that social presence may evolve over time, and the components are framed to include both emotional and learning-focused behaviors; the three components are now labeled identifying with the community, communicating in a trusting environment, and developing interpersonal relationships (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2010; Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007).

Cognitive presence has been defined as "the extent to which the participants in… a community of inquiry are able to construct meaning through sustained communication" (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2001, p. 11). It reflects Dewey's *practical inquiry* model of learning, which involves four stages: a triggering event or problem; exploration of the concepts and issues; integration of information and consideration of solutions; and resolution through testing the validity of solutions and considering further applications (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2001). This involves deep engagement with concepts through discourse among members of a group, and processing ideas so as to produce shared understanding, reflection, critical thinking, and application (Akyol & Garrison, 2011; Kanuka, Rourke & LaFlamme, 2007; Shea & Bidjerano, 2009).

The three elements of the model, cognitive, social and teaching presence, interact with one another to create high-quality online learning (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2010). There is a growing body of evidence that teaching presence precedes, and causes, social presence and cognitive presence (Garrison, Cleveland-Innes, & Fung, 2010; Joo, Lim & Kim, 2011; Shea & Bidjerano, 2009; Shea, Li, Swan, & Pickett, 2005).

While originally the Community of Inquiry was focused primarily on asynchronous discussions (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison & Archer, 2001; Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000; Rourke, Anderson,

10 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/tensions-between-cognitive-and-social-presence-in-blended-k-12-classes/157576

Related Content

Reflections Concerning Technology: A Case for the Philosophy of Technology in Early Childhood Teacher Education and Professional Development Programs
Andew Neil Gibbons (2010). *Technology for Early Childhood Education and Socialization: Developmental Applications and Methodologies (pp. 1-19).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/reflections-concerning-technology/36620

Meeting the Needs of Adolescents and Young Adults with Disabilities: An E-Mentoring Approach
Katharine Hill, Joe Timmonsand Christen Opsal (2011). *Telementoring in the K-12 Classroom: Online Communication Technologies for Learning (pp. 135-147).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/meeting-needs-adolescents-young-adults/46298

Reconceptualising Scaffolding for New Media Contexts
Nicola Yellandand Jennifer Masters (2009). *Handbook of Research on New Media Literacy at the K-12 Level: Issues and Challenges (pp. 243-256).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/reconceptualising-scaffolding-new-media-contexts/35917

The Journey into Distance Learning: Test Drives, Roadblocks, and Destinations
Fawn Warner (2008). *Videoconferencing Technology in K-12 Instruction: Best Practices and Trends (pp. 35-51).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/journey-into-distance-learning/30774

Challenge-Based Learning Using iPad Technology in the Middle School
Christie Bledsoeand Jodi Pilgrim (2015). *Tablets in K-12 Education: Integrated Experiences and Implications (pp. 238-261).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/challenge-based-learning-using-ipad-technology-in-the-middle-school/113868