Field Note

Creating Communities of Inquiry in Research and Scholarship Via Online Videos

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ABSTRACT

Fostering a sense of community in postsecondary education is challenging. Accomplishing this from a distance via online education makes it even more difficult by inserting an additional layer of complexity. The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a rapid shift to increased remote communication, collaboration, and research dissemination. Drawing on my experience as both an online instructional designer and a doctoral student who began my PhD amid a global pandemic, I use Garrison et al.'s community of inquiry (CoI) framework to explore how online videos and webinars (both synchronous and asynchronous) can be used to foster a sense of community, inspire learning, and support research sharing in virtual environments.

RÉSUMÉ

Encourager un sentiment de communauté dans l'enseignement postsecondaire est un défi. Le faire à distance par l'enseignement en ligne est encore plus difficile car on ajoute un niveau supplémentaire de complexité. Or, la pandémie de COVID-19 a rapidement augmenté le besoin de communiquer, de collaborer et de diffuser la recherche à distance. Dans cet article, en m'appuyant sur mon expérience de conceptrice d'enseignement en ligne et d'étudiante de 3ᵉ cycle ayant commencé son doctorat au milieu de la pandémie, j'utiliserai le modèle de la communauté d'enquête de Garrison et al. pour explorer comment on peut utiliser les vidéos en ligne et les webinaires (synchrones et asynchrones) pour favoriser un sentiment de communauté, inspirer l'apprentissage, et soutenir le partage de la recherche dans des environnements virtuels.

Keywords / Mots clés : community of inquiry, doctoral studies, online education, online videos, webinars / communauté d'enquête, études doctorales, éducation en ligne, vidéos en ligne, webinaires

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Though online webinars are not new to the world of postsecondary education, the emergence of COVID-19 necessitated that individuals communicate and share knowledge from a distance (Hartshorne et al., 2020; Nichols et al., 2021). Scholars navigated various technologies used to connect them from afar and hosted a variety of colloquia,

workshops, and webinars to present and discuss research and pedagogical initiatives in virtual spaces. This article provides insights from the perspective of the author (as a graduate student who started her doctoral studies in a remote environment) with regard to how such virtual presentations brought together scholars and explores how communities of inquiry (CoI) are fostered in remote environments.

The CoI model established by Garrison et al. (1999) presents three overlapping domains: social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence. The authors suggest that an educational experience exists at the intersection of these domains. Using this model, I frame the "presenters" as the teacher and the virtual presentation attendees as the "students." In extending this model to knowledge sharing and knowledge mobilization via online webinars, I wish to show how the way in which presenters choose and organize content—coupled with the way in which they facilitate the online space—impacts how individuals construct knowledge (Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007; Lee 2014). Each of the three CoI domains is discussed in terms of how they impacted my academic journey as a PhD candidate. Table 1 provides a summary of how I experienced each domain within the CoI model during my time as a doctoral student.

Table 1: Examples of CoI in online presentations

CoI domain	Examples
Social presence	• Group communication • Collaboration • Time for questions and answers • Incorporation of the chat feature • Use of emojis
Cognitive presence	• Drawing on personal experiences • Making connections between theory and practice • Sharing information • Clarifying misconceptions • Access to presentation material (before/after/during presentation) • Incorporating breaks
Teaching presence	• Initiating conversations/discussions • Scaffolding content • Knowledge of audience/attendees • Facilitating opportunities for group interactions

Connecting with mentors, colleagues, and research groups was, perhaps, one of my biggest concerns when I began my PhD remotely in September 2020. Though I had completed my master's degree online, I had been mentally prepared for that experience, since that program was designed to be offered in a remote manner. During my doctoral studies, in an effort to build relationships with people and to network, I attended virtual workshops, seminars, and graduate student meetings. In relation to the CoI model, I was seeking out experiences that would foster a sense of community and social presence. In the CoI model, *social presence* involves communication, group cohesion, and collaboration (Garrison et al., 1999). I found that social presence was often most prevalent in online spaces where individuals could ask questions, discuss concepts, and have the choice of keeping cameras on or off. In the case of synchronous online webinars, I witnessed such activities through platforms that allowed individuals to utilize

the chat function and present questions via the raise-hand feature. Under these conditions, attendees were able to communicate with one another and co-construct knowledge. Organizers of online webinars, to help foster a CoI, may consider the communication and collaboration tools offered by online platform. Incorporating online discussions has proven to facilitate collective knowledge building, as doing so contributes to fostering learner efficacy and social presence in online learning environments (Boothe et al., 2018; Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007; Lin, 2022).

While completing my PhD remotely, I felt that perhaps the most elusive of the three CoI domains was *cognitive presence*. Garrison et al. (1999) identify four steps within cognitive presence: triggering event, exploration, integration, and resolution. Within online workshops, seminars, or colloquia, there is often a theme or concept that brings everyone together (i.e., the triggering event). For instance, there can be a shared sense of wonder, curiosity, or intrigue when registering for an online event of interest. How the event is hosted determines the trajectory that attendees will follow through the categories of cognitive presence. For example, if content is delivered in a traditional lecture-style format, it may be difficult for attendees to move beyond the first step of cognitive presence. During this primary phase of cognitive presence, audience members often share a common goal or interest. Moreover, by attending these events, attendees with common interests can form connections with each other. Furthermore, knowledge of the audience members and expectations regarding the online event may be used to shape the virtual event and provide a natural segue to the second element of cognitive presence: exploration.

To proceed to the second step within cognitive presence (exploration), attendees must feel that they can ask questions and clarify misunderstandings and ambiguities. During my doctoral studies, I found that one way to address this issue in online webinars was for presenters to solicit questions ahead of the session. Indeed, by collecting questions and comments in advance, they could design their presentation based on audience feedback. Such an approach would also support the exploration phase regardless of whether the presentation was offered synchronously or asynchronously.

Another way to foster exploration involves giving access to content before the event. In this case, providing attendees with material prior to the start of the event can help them to become more comfortable with the content and come with a list of questions. I am particularly fond of this option, as I prefer to take notes and generate talking points and questions at my own pace. Moreover, the ability to access content prior to a presentation allows me to familiarize myself with the information that will be presented and think of questions ahead of time. I feel that when presenters share content and ask for questions in advance, my input and experiences are being valued. In my experience, asking for input and/or questions prior to the event in an anonymized manner provides an alternative way for attendees to engage with the presenter as well as the content without their having to assume the onus of posing questions in live time.

To support exploration, it is also important that presenters be mindful of time. For example, they should have a clear start and end time. Going over the allotted time may result in attendees growing impatient or having to leave without event closure. Within

the context of a virtual webinar, the time that is dedicated to questions is also something to consider. For example, some of the webinars I attended incorporated breaks throughout the session to enable presenters to ask for questions or feedback from attendees. Breaks may also be integrated to allow for individuals to move, stretch, disconnect, or engage in an activity that will allow them to return to the event feeling refreshed.

The third dimension of cognitive presence—integration—involves attendees exchanging ideas and constructing new knowledge by making connections between new concepts and prior knowledge. The way in which the platform hosts the event has the potential to impact whether online communities can arrive at this stage. For example, I felt that whether or not participants could communicate with one another or with the host influenced whether knowledge was co-constructed or individually developed. Environments that allow for collaboration and communication help individuals take different perspectives and spark meaningful conversations. A prime example of this interactivity might be a synchronous online course for newly admitted doctoral students. Under the circumstances, instructors may choose to discuss concepts as a large group as well as in breakout rooms. Within the smaller groups, individuals may feel more inclined to share thoughts, receive feedback, ask questions, and co-construct meaning. By conversing with their classmates, students can take what they learned during the course and apply it to their studies. Such was the case in my proseminar class during my first year of doctoral studies: all new doctoral students took the class and learned about navigating program milestones, applying for scholarships, submitting publications, and joining research teams.

Finally, resolution looks at applying new ideas and knowledge and exploring new concepts with a critical lens. This process may look like taking skills acquired during the webinar and being able to apply them to one's own practice as an educator or researcher. Also, one of the benefits of hosting webinars online is the possibility of sharing a recording of the webinar along with supporting materials. Many of the online courses and webinars that I attended during my graduate studies offered this option, giving attendees more flexibility and autonomy. In my case, taking advantage of these resources gave me more opportunities to process the information I had acquired and apply it to my life. Moreover, the process of inquiry and learning becomes an iterative one that extends beyond the scope of the online webinar. As a result of attending virtual webinars, attendees may apply what they have learned to their everyday lives and share what they have learned via virtual communities.

The choices made about what content is covered, how material is presented, and the ways in which an online event is facilitated and designed contribute to the third domain, *teaching presence* (Garrison et al., 1999). Selecting content to present during an online webinar involves considering the knowledge of the audience members. How much background does one present? What experiences do audience members have coming into the presentation? What are attendees hoping to take away from the experience? Moreover, this principle of the CoI model involves a synthesis of content expertise and pedagogical knowledge. Depending on the content and audience, the presenter may choose to initiate conversations using a chat feature within the platform or engage

in discussions with participants within the main meeting or in breakout rooms. Designing and facilitating an online environment that is conducive to knowledge sharing and building requires finding a balance between content selection, medium of dissemination, and activities. Furthermore, teaching presence impacts the social dynamic of the online community and, according to Garrison et al., "is a responsibility that may be shared among the teacher and some or all of the other participants" (1999, p. 90).

My experiences as both an educator and instructional designer have influenced how I have come to view teaching presence. Whether it is preparing an online presentation or developing a lesson, the creation and facilitation of educational experiences reflective processes. There arise elements of learning, critical assessment, and questioning as I continue to shape my identity as a scholar. In addition, my goal as a scholar has always been to create a space that is accessible, inclusive, and engaging. As Garrison et al. note, teaching presence is "the binding element in creating a community of inquiry for educational purposes" (1999, p. 96). A key component highlighted by the authors in their CoI model, at the intersection of social presence and teaching presence, is "setting climate" (p. 88). Within virtual communities, this action may look like opening the conferencing platform a few minutes early to welcome attendees or to have informal conversations. Or it may look like sharing expectations surrounding discourse in the online space.

While online presentation platforms provide an opportunity for people to connect with one another, they are not without their flaws. Accessing online content requires individuals to have reliable internet and electronic devices at their disposal. It is also important to consider accessibility when developing and delivering online presentations. Though some platforms have made improvements to their accessibility standards (e.g., live transcripts), there is still work to be done on the part of the presenter. Moreover, to foster a community of inquiry, it is essential that online spaces have inclusion and accessibility at their foundation.

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