



Building communities of inquiry online

In recent weeks everyone has done a brilliant job of rapidly adapting to teaching in an online environment, and while we all hope to be back on campus before too long, online teaching and learning is likely to become a feature of UK higher education for some time to come in some form.

We therefore need to think about how we develop our online pedagogy, in particular how to provide a rich educational experience for our students.

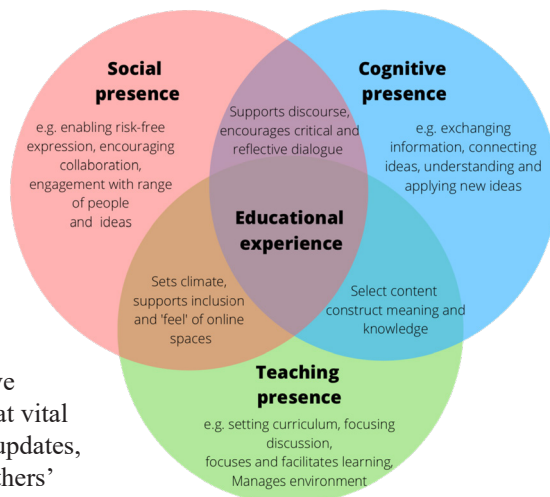
Taking the Community of Inquiry model, drawing on the work of Garrison and Anderson (2011), one aspect worth exploring at the moment is how to encourage social presence through online technologies.

Cheryl Reynolds, one of our UTFs who specialises in technologies for learning explains: “Social presence enables participants to identify with the community, to project their personalities and to form relationships by communicating with each other. Cognitive presence enables the co-

construction of meaning via this communication. Teaching presence regulates and mediates the whole process so that the intended outcomes and the needs of the learners are met.

“Social networking platforms have social affordances that support that vital social presence, including status updates, the ability to ‘like’ and reply to others’ posts, constant updating to evoke that sense that you are part of an active and engaged online community. We are currently exploring some of these tools with a view to rolling them out to all staff over summer including platforms such as Microsoft Teams which is already being used in some sectors of education to encourage social presence.”

Other techniques, such as using humour, actively encouraging reflective participation during teaching sessions, and remembering to use students’ names when chatting with them can encourage social presence in live discussions, even using students’ preferred



Community of Inquiry model, adapted from Vaughan, Cleveland-Innes and Garrison (2013)

nickname to establish that connection with them.

While the Brightspace discussion forums do have a role to play in developing more interactive strategies, social media tools also have a lot to offer and we are currently building our capacity and exploring how best to support colleagues in developing techniques to encourage social presence and to employ such approaches in the coming months.

360 Degree Module Evaluation system goes live



Our new module evaluation system has gone live this month, giving us the ability to feed back to our students their collective voice and also share with them our improvement action plans.

The 360ME project - to give students a 360 degree view of module evaluation - came about because of concerns about poor engagement with our surveys. We asked our students why this was the case, and they told us they didn't see the point in completing our surveys as they never saw the results.

We listened to their concerns and have developed a new system to help module leaders collect survey responses and share them along with any action plans. Over the next few weeks, module leaders will receive an email with instructions on how to complete the ME360 process and a copy of the guidance can be found [here](#). Project lead Ruth Stoker said: “It is important that we encourage all our students to work with us to evaluate our teaching and learning and help us improve what we do. By sharing module evaluation feedback, we hope more students feel encouraged to engage with the survey in the coming years.”

At present, the ME360 process is deployed on standard undergraduate modules, with non-standard, post-graduate and placement modules expected to be brought into the scheme in the next academic year. For more information email r.stoker@hud.ac.uk

Applause please (and other tips) - engaging our students in online learning



One of the challenges of teaching in online environments is ensuring students are engaged in their learning. Georgina Blakeley, (pictured) Director of Teaching and Learning in the School of Human and Health Sciences, has considerable experience working with the Open University as a course leader, and has grappled with this challenge for a long time.

Here she shares her top tips for keeping students engaged online.

Rethink approaches

“Forget any preconceptions about what interaction looks like and learn to value all kinds of engagement,” she says.

“Students differ enormously in their ability and readiness to engage online. Few readily take to using the microphone. This means that you need to rethink and value other ways in which students interact.”

Chat tools can be powerful in allowing students to talk to each other as well as to the tutor but as Georgina points out: “In order to readily respond to the chat box, which can behave a bit like a runaway train, it is good practice to try to have at least two tutors running an online session especially where numbers are large.

“Also, learn to value the use of emoji as these count as student interaction and should be valued as such.”

No dozing

It is important to check student engagement more frequently than in F2F teaching too. “Teaching in an online environment can often feel like talking in a vacuum as there are none of the usual cues that you get in a physical environment.

“You can’t see students laughing, falling asleep or day-dreaming!” she adds.

It is a good idea to alternate knowledge delivery

and periods of activity into shorter manageable chunks and initiate action such as asking students to ‘applaud’ if they have understood or use a smiley if they are ready to go to the next section.

Quizzes

Quick polls or quizzes are useful to see how your students are feeling or to check understanding.

“Your goal is to get students to ‘lean in’ and to do this you need to re-engage them frequently.”

Keeping sessions really simple is important, particularly in the first five minutes, as we need to teach students to use the environment as well as curriculum content, and asking them to use emojis or say hello in the chat box can be empowering.

Georgina adds: “One good technique for getting students to speak using the microphone is to ask students to offer their ideas in response to a question or a problem ‘faster than I can type’.

“Pitting the students against the tutor in this way can lead to a real deluge of ideas and also avoids putting an individual student on the spot. All students can join in at the same time and it is fun to watch the poor tutor try to type quickly.

“Students are usually quite happy to then point out all the spelling errors too.”

Anything which gives students confidence and allows them to start from a position of authority or expertise is always helpful, such as getting them to talk about their top study tips.

“Don’t underestimate just how nervous many students will feel in an online environment especially if they are first year students.”

It’s behind you...



Stop press: Dinosaurs on campus! Thanks to our VC Bob Cryan who has shared his Zoom background with us - apparently very useful for keeping senior staff on their toes. If you have a fun background to share, please drop us an email.