Emotional Presence in Building an Online Learning Community Among Non-traditional Graduate Students

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Theoretical Framework: Community of Inquiry (CoI)

- Cognitive Presence – How we think
- Social Presence – How we present as real people
- Teaching Presence – How to design courses and facilitate

Emotion and Relationship Building in Online Learning

❖ Emotional expression is one of the three categories under social presence in the Community of Inquiry (CoI) Framework.
❖ Emotional presence has been proposed to be the fourth dimension of CoI (Cleveland-Innes & Campbell, 2012).
❖ Emotional presence is a significant factor in successful online learning (Swerdloff, 2015)
❖ Research explored relationship building in online settings (e.g., Cardullo & Burton, 2016)
Andragogy for Non-traditional Students

- 7.5 million (37.69%) older than 25 learners attended colleges and universities (NCES, 2019).
- Andragogy theory (Knowles, 1970) explained that non-traditional learning is self-directed, intrinsically motivated, eager to apply learning to fulfill their social roles to solve practical problems.
Problem Statement

❖ Emotional presence in online learning is still underdeveloped.
❖ Studies on non-traditional adult learners in online learning environment are limited.
❖ There is a gap in literature on emotional presence and relationship building in online environments among non-traditional graduate students.
The purpose of this study was to explore the role emotional presence plays in online learning among non-traditional graduate students.
Research Questions

❖ RQ1: To what extent emotion would emerge in the online learning process for the non-traditional adult learner students?

❖ RQ2: What is the relationship between emotional presence and cognitive, social, teaching presence, and learners’ characteristics (e.g., demographic information, personal experience with computer technologies, self-paced online learning, and social media/communication tools usages)?

❖ RQ3: Do emotional, cognitive, social, and teaching presence have a significant predictive relationship with students’ satisfaction towards their online learning experiences?
Method

❖ Participants: non-traditional master’s and doctoral students in Educational Leadership and Higher Education graduate programs in a large public research university in Texas.
❖ 100% online graduate programs.
Method

❖ Qualitative:
  ❖ An open-ended question asked about participants’ overall online learning experiences and why they were/weren’t satisfied.

❖ Quantitative:
  ❖ The Community of Inquiry survey (Arbaugh et al.’s, 2008)
  ❖ Emotional presence 6-item survey (Cleveland-Innes and Campbell’s, 2012)
  ❖ Online learning satisfaction (Artino’s, 2008)
  ❖ Demographics and online/tech information
Results 1

❖ RQ1: To what extent emotion emerged in the online learning process for the non-traditional adult learner students?
❖ Following the 15 emotional constructs (Cleveland-Innes and Campbell’s, 2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identified Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
<td>21 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiness</td>
<td>12 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frustration</td>
<td>7 times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disappointment</td>
<td>7 times</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Enjoyment is not a goal. It is a feeling that accompanies important ongoing activity. - Paul Goodman

“...simply enjoyed working with others online”

“The online learning experience was enhanced through the opportunity to discuss content with my cohort members, as well as, the opportunity to complete Zoom sessions with Q&A. My professor was also quick to respond to questions via email and answered any questions the students might have had. All learning modules provided sufficient content and examples to support our learning.”

“...writing a research paper with an interview was an enjoyable experience, and also lead me down quite a few paths of learning outside of class”
Happiness is a state of well-being and contentment; a pleasurable or satisfying experience. - Merriam-Webster

“The professor chose engaging (and affordable) materials and clarifies and explains even more through videotaped lectures. She also makes herself available for a weekly online question session and is easily accessible through email. I feel very supported to be successful in this course..”

I like to work at my pace and loved the ability to self-pace myself.
Frustration

“There were also times that a guiding worksheet was mentioned but not provided in the course content. This was very frustrating to myself as I wasn't sure if I was doing the assignment correctly and I knew that it was for a grade.”
Disappointment

“I would have enjoyed having a discussion board topic that could be more relaxed and conversational as they are partly designed to replace in class conversation. There could always be those formal writing discussions but the lack of authenticity was concerning in some classes..”
Results 1 continued

Following the emotional categories of different functionalities (Derks, Fischer, & Bos, 2008):

- Directed affectiveness (n = 30)
- Activities emotion (n = 22)
- Outcome emotion (n = 8)
Directed affectiveness – recognition and sharing of emotions and mood between individuals.

“I am grateful for my advisor that also served as my dissertation chair. Dr. A was always responsive, answered emails promptly and did not hesitate to call me when necessary. Three reasons: convenience, responsive professors, clear expectations.”

“Going through the program you feel like a small family as you get to know the other classmates. It is nice to share ups and downs as educational leaders/administrators.”
Results 2

RQ2: What is the relationship between emotional presence and cognitive, social, teaching presence, and learners’ characteristics?

The Descriptive Statistics of Cognitive, Teaching, Social, and Emotional Presence (N= 46)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive Presence</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Presence</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Presence</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Presence</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results 2

RQ2: What is the relationship between emotional presence and cognitive, social, teaching presence, and learners’ characteristics?

No significant association between Emotional Presence and

- Gender
- Age
- Experiences using online computer technologies
- Experiences using online computer technologies
- Experiences with self-paced online learning
Results 3: Predictors of Online Learning Satisfaction

❖ RQ3: Do emotional, cognitive, social, and teaching presence have a significant predictive relationship with students’ satisfaction towards their online learning experiences?

❖ A hierarchical multiple regression analysis showed that emotional presence alone significantly predicted online learning satisfaction, $F(1, 44) = 4.847, p = .033$, adjusted $R^2 = .079$.

❖ Altogether, emotional, cognitive, social, and teaching presence significantly predicted online learning satisfaction, $F(4, 41) = 4.088, p = .007$, adjusted $R^2 = .215$. 
Discussion

**Qualitative data**

- suggested there was a clear, natural presence of emotional expressions when participants talked about their overall online learning experiences.
  - dichotomous emotions among participants.

**Quantitative data**

- showed the emotional presence rating being distanced from other CoI presences.
  - a greater dispersion of emotional presence rating.
Discussion

❖ Participants need interpersonal connections in online learning with instructor and peers.

❖ Relationship building sets a good online program (especially for non-traditional graduate students) from counterparts.

❖ Adult learners who are working full time may benefit from positive interactions and relationship as a source of support in online classes.
Implications for Research

❖ Further investigations on diverse emotions that students experience/express through online courses
❖ Comparative studies on emotional presence across different areas of study (e.g., social sciences, STEM, education, professional schools, etc.)
❖ Comparison of emotional presence between synchronous online classes and asynchronous online learning
Practical Implications

❖ For online course designers
   ❖ Carefully examine audience characteristics and their background to meet their needs
   ❖ Incorporate emotional elements from syllabus to grading

❖ For online course instructors:
   ❖ Be visible (pictures, video/audio messages)
   ❖ Be supportive; be humane
   ❖ Be a community builder for students
   ❖ Be available outside class
Questions and Comments

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