

Building Community In On- Line Courses

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Prior Experience Ware

- student in “Developing curriculum for on-line delivery” at SUNY Oswego
- Teaching a hybrid course --Issues in Foundations of Education-- using modules developed in the above course
- Graduate work in Instructional Development – Syracuse University

Prior Experience Stuck

- Teaching a grad/undergrad course in Sociology of Aging for SUNY Oswego (SLN course) for several years
- Developing a new course, “Sociology of Tourism” during the past year
- SLN training and extensive work with several MIDs

Collaborative Experiences

- Reviewing each other's courses – syllabi, assessment instruments, assignments
- Sharing readings and references
- When Ware took the DL course in developing materials for on-line instruction she used Stuck's teaching experience as a basis for many of her questions/issues (e.g., grading)

An Instructional Development “problem”

- Stuck has received the Chancellor’s award for excellence in teaching and other accolades, however her Sociology of Aging course was “dry, dull and boring’ in its first iteration.
- It was “technically OK” but it lacked something..and course evaluations showed it.

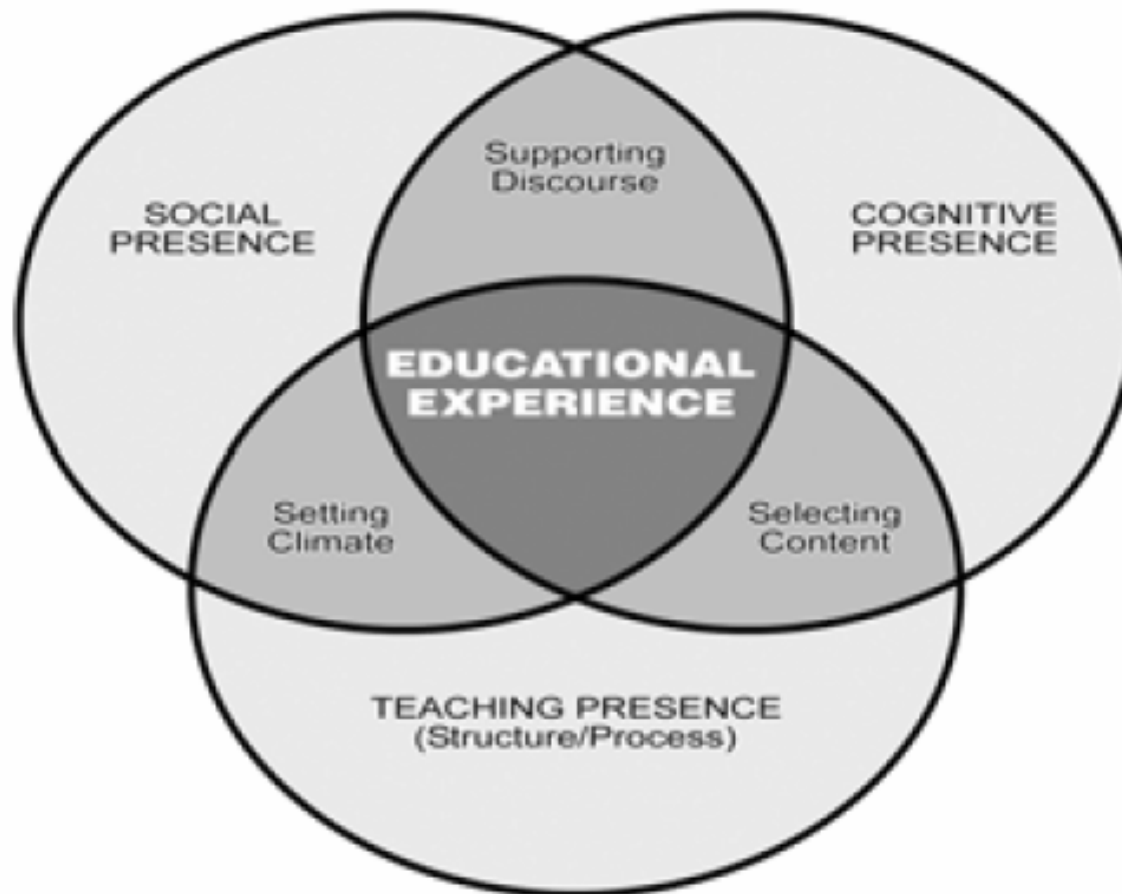
An ID “problem”, cont.

- When Ware was on sabbatical, she experienced DL for the first time. Her course was exceptional. Much of what made the course exceptional was the “community of scholars” who participated in that course.
- She kept wondering – how could Mary Stuck incorporate that into her course – what needed to be changed?

The concept of “community”

- Current research in distance learning stresses ‘teacher presence’, “social presence” and “cognitive presence” as necessary aspects of a community of inquiry. (Garrison, Anderson and Archer, 2000)
- Ware experienced this sense of “community” and social presence in her DL course, evidenced by: students showing compassion for each other; the formation (at student request) of a “student help” area on the SLN site, so we could assist each other, etc.; encouragement of students to continue the course if they considered dropping out.

Community of Inquiry



Communication Medium

Figure 1: Community of Inquiry

(Reproduced by permission from Pergamon.

n Garrison, D. R., Anderson, T., & Archer, W. Critical inquiry in a text-based environment: Computer conferencing in higher education. *The Internet and Higher Education* 2(2-3): 87-105, 1999.)

Enhancing Community of Inquiry

- Defining community
- What does “community” involve?
- What enhancements might provide for more “community” in a DL course?

What IS Community?

- McMillan and Chavis (1986) : “a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together” (p. 9)
- McMillan, D.W. and Chavis, D.M (1986) Sense of community: A definition and theory. J. of Community Psych 14(1), 6-23.

Components of Community

- Spirit
- Trust
- Interaction
- Common Expectations -- that we are a “community of scholars”
- adapted from Rovai, A.P. “Building Sense of Community at a Distance” IRRODL April 2002)

How could Sociology of Aging be altered to add more “community”?

More teacher comments on student
discussion

More introduction of ‘personal’ information
about the teacher

Community building assignments (“people
bingo”)

Results

- Better course evaluations
- Better quality student work
- Students corresponding with the professor
AFTER the course was over

Another Instructional Development “problem”

- EDU 671 – Issues in Foundations of Education tends to be ‘a required course in which few students are interested’
- Taken in the summer – there is little time and too much content
- Audience consists of practicing teachers who want practical information, not theory

Could a Hybrid course be a solution?

- Allows student work outside of class (more efficient use of time)
- Allows many different modalities of learning
- Allows everyone to be heard (discussion assignments)

EDU 671 - Web CT Module – History of Education

- Solutions included: several discussion rooms with provocative topics
- Assignment – a personal “time line” of his/her life...and then a time line of events related to some “underrepresented group’s” educational history
- Community resulted in several ways – better than face to face classroom
 - Everyone introduced him/herself to everyone else
 - Everyone had to respond to several posts
 - Everyone shared each other’s time lines

Changes in Student Response

- VERY POSITIVE to DL component
- Evidence: student evaluations
informal student comments
quality of student work

Things to “take away”

- Collaboration helps – in designing courses and in improving them
- ‘social presence’ and “community” can be lacking in DL courses unless specifically planned for
- Some useful references

Resources (just a beginning)

- Garrison, D.R et al. Critical Inquiry in a Text-Based Environment: Computer Conferencing in Higher Education. The Internet and Higher Education 2(2-3). 87-105.
- Rourke, L. et al. Assessing Social Presence in Asynchronous Text-Based Computer Conferencing. *Journal of Distance Education* (2001)
(http://cade.athabasca.ca/vol14.2/rourke_et_al.html)
- Rovai, A. P. Building Sense of Community at a Distance. *IRRODL* April 2002
(<http://www.irrodl.org/content/v3.1/rovai.html>)