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Better Communication in Online Education

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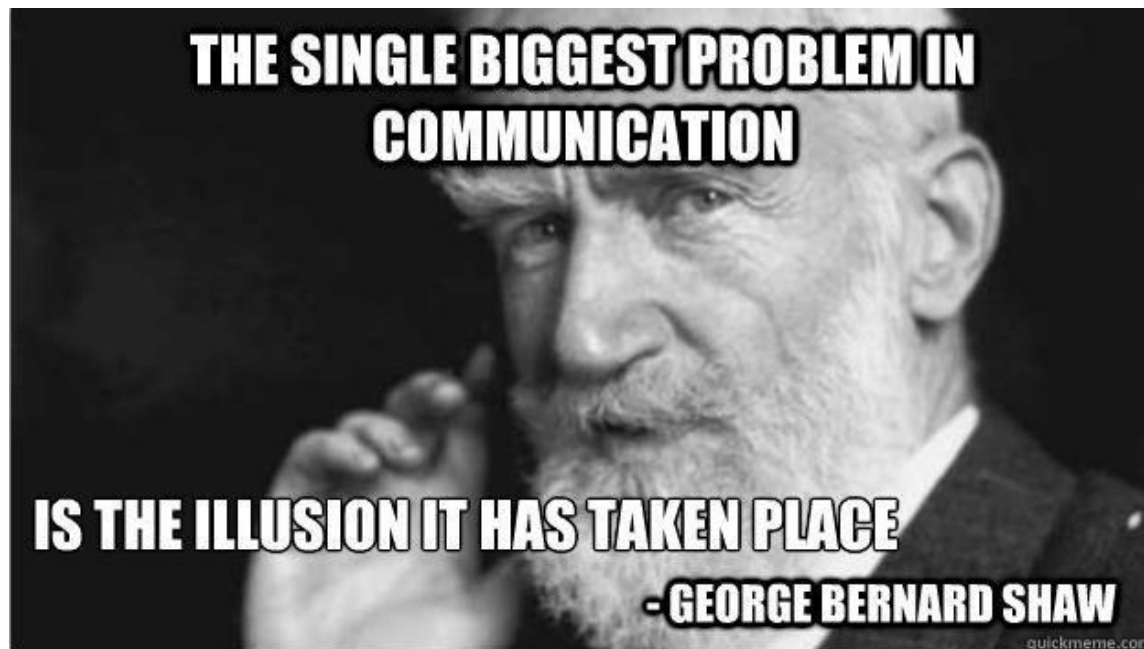Institute for Education Innovation

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Question (aim)

How can you communicate more effectively with students in courses which you deliver online?

THE SINGLE BIGGEST PROBLEM IN COMMUNICATION

IS THE ILLUSION IT HAS TAKEN PLACE

- GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

quickmeme.com

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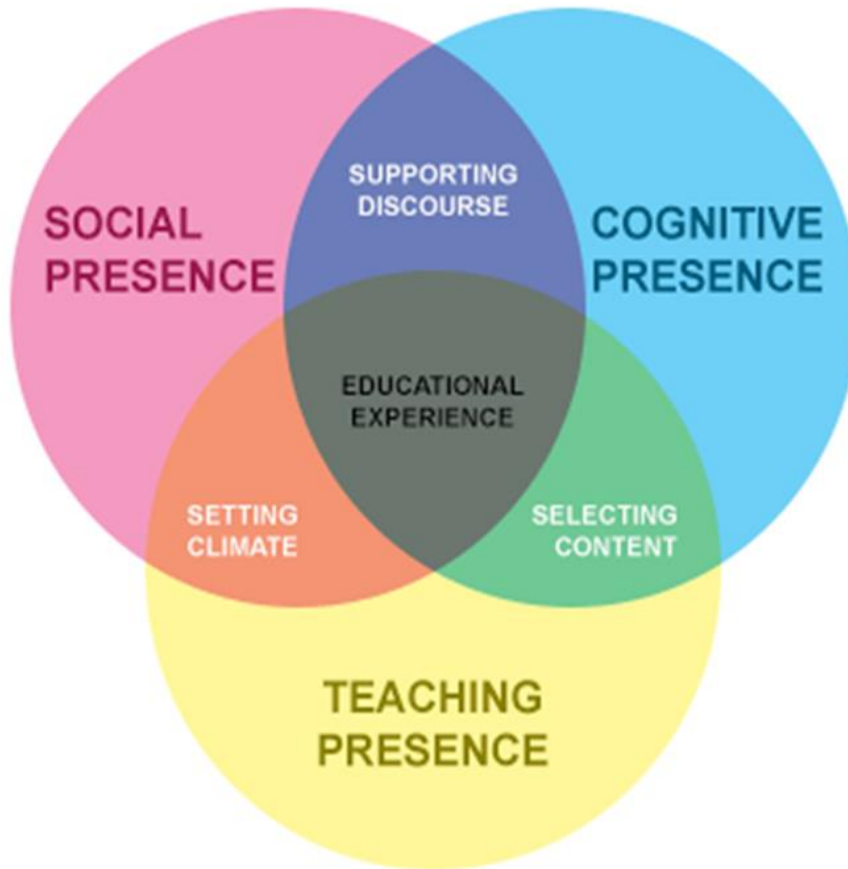
Outline of Today's Webinar

1. Background Information: Community of Inquiry (CoI)

2. Establishing Teaching Presence

3. Feedback

4. Supporting Student Discourse

5. Social Presence: Being Authentic

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1. Background: Community of Inquiry (CoI)
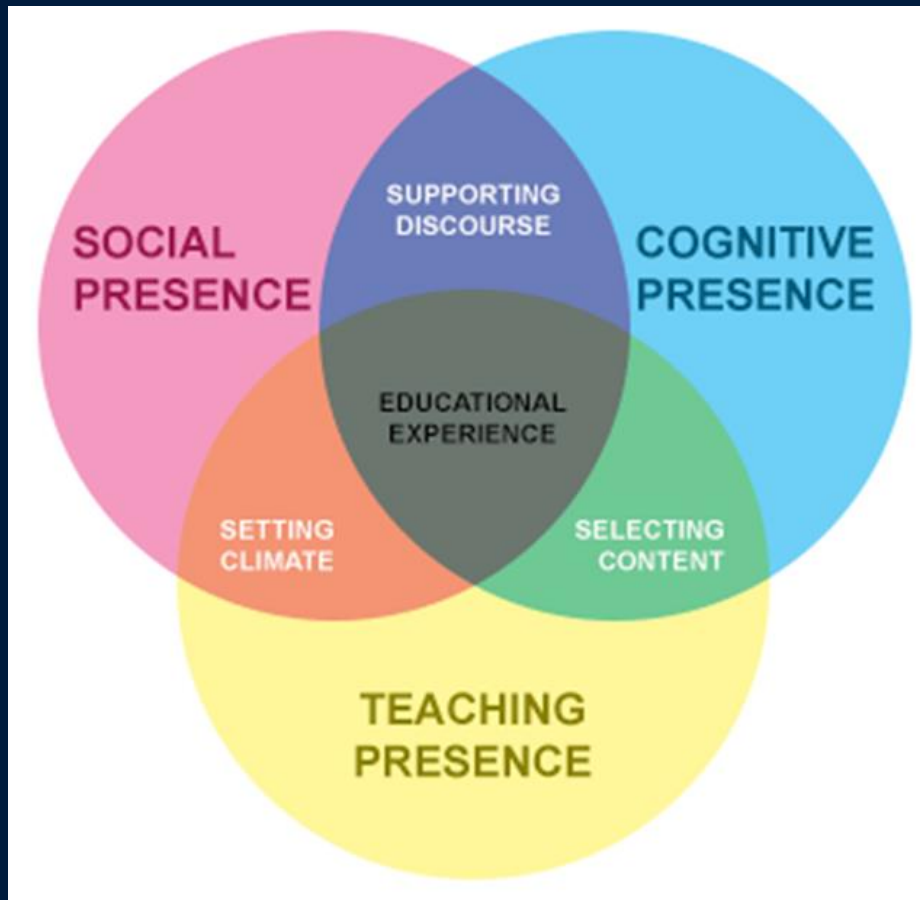
(Adapted from Garrison et al., 2007, cited in Fiock 2020)

Community of Inquiry (CoI)

- Garrison et al. (2000):

- Educational Experience depends on

  ✓ Social Presence

  ✓ Cognitive Presence

  ✓ Teaching Presence

  (cited in Fiock, 2020)

Community of Inquiry (CoI): Relevance

CoI improves communication by:

- A feeling of **connection** between physically distant learners (Fiock, 2020)

- A sense of **belonging** and interdependence (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, cited in Fiock 2020)

- More effective **information flow**

- Increased group **support** and **cohesion** (Rovai, 2000, cited in Fiock, 2020)
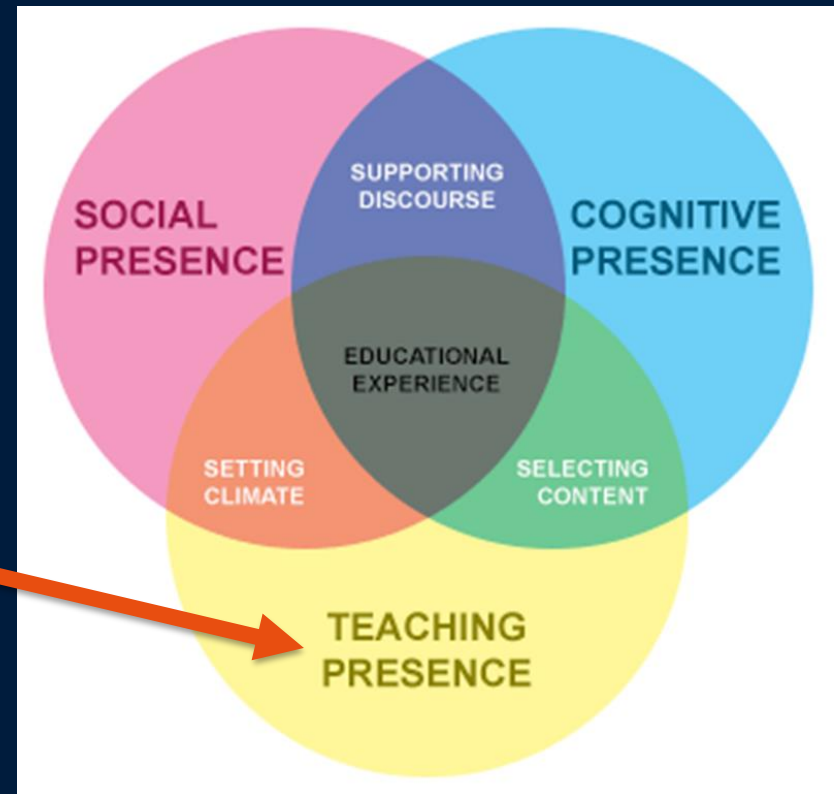
2. Establishing Teaching Presence

Community of Inquiry
Adapted from Garrison et al 2000, cited in Fiock 2020

What is Teaching Presence?

Teaching Presence: 3 components

- **Instructional design**
  - Setting the curriculum

- **Facilitation of discourse**
  - Establishing course climate
  - Reinforcing students' contributions

- **Direct instruction**
  - Summarizing discussion
  - Presenting content
  - Asking questions

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(Anderson et al. 2001, cited in Fiock, 2020)

Teaching Presence: Instructional Design

- **Clear communication at course start**

  - "Organization of the learning experience"
    (Preismann, 2014, p.2)

  - **Intended Learning Outcomes** clearly stated

  - **Course Manual** published and easily accessed

  - **Assessment** format communicated in the virtual learning space

  - **"Netiquette"** criteria established

    (Anderson et al. 2001, cited in Sheriden & Kelly, 2010, p.768)

Teaching Presence: Facilitation of Discourse

In a traditional classroom students get a lot of course info **from each other** in the moments before and after class.

Student "grapevines" in traditional classrooms

- Information exchange is spontaneous in the moments before and after class.

- There is more <u>passive</u> information exchange and knowledge acquisition.

I HEARD IT THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE

How to compensate in online learning?

Good communication online means that

- The teacher needs to be **CLEAR** in all aspects of course structure and organization

- Reassure students with **regular** and **consistent** contact

YOU MEAN TO TELL ME MY QUESTION IS ANSWERED IN THE DIRECTIONS?
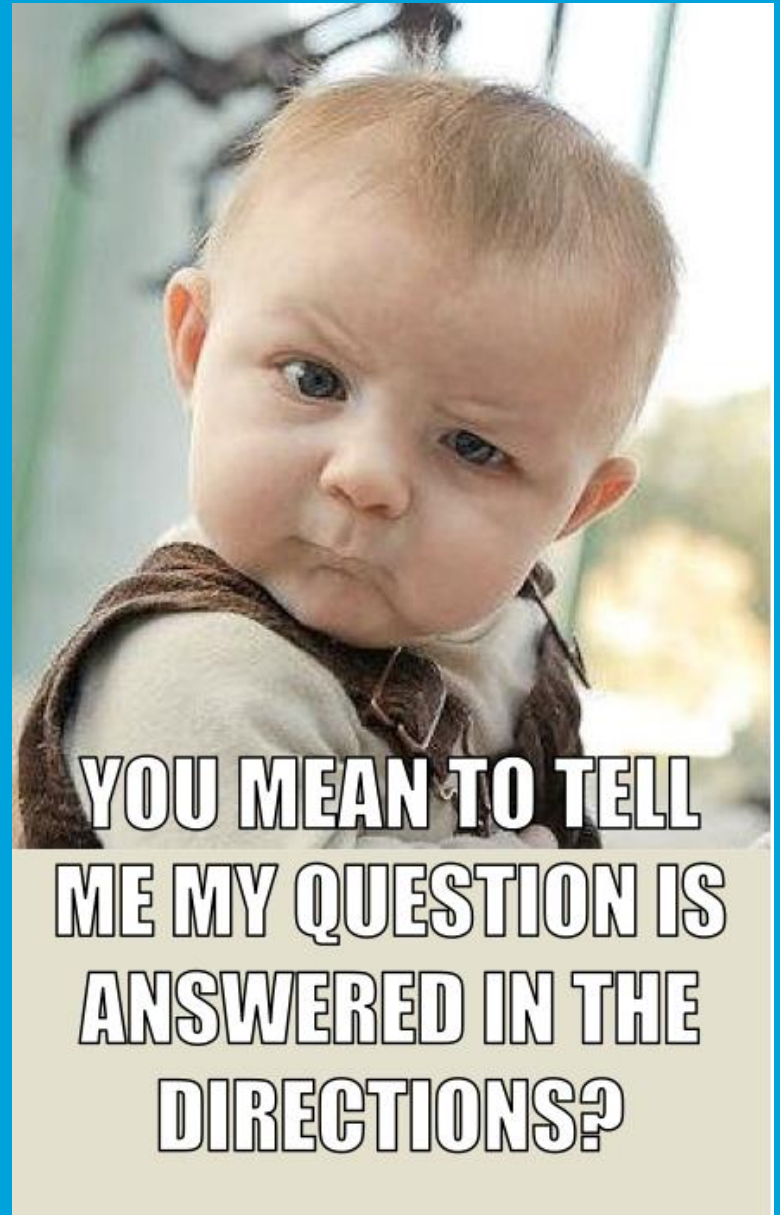
Teaching Presence: Facilitation of Discourse

- **Regular and consistent communication**

  ➢ **Weekly communication** to set objectives

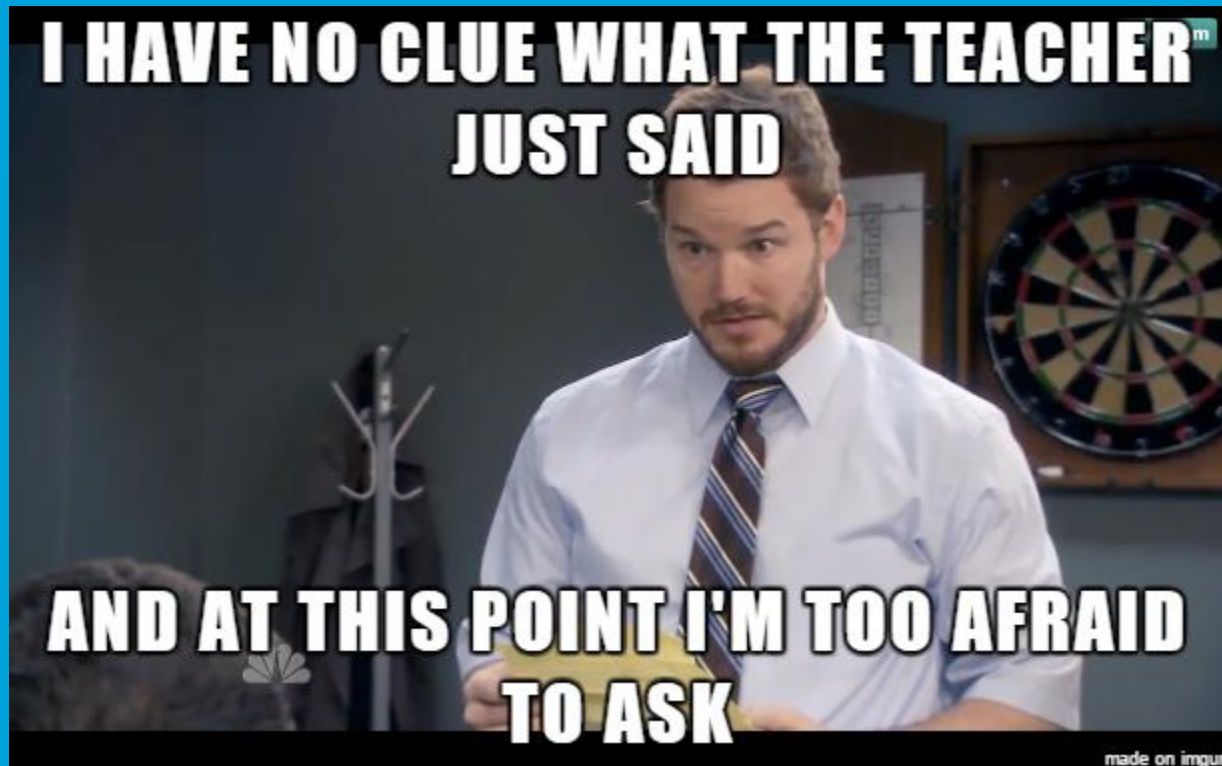 Examples

    - **Weekly contact:** "Welcome to Week …" email

    - **Short video** to set the week's goals (Preisman, 2014)

    - **Discussion** forum posts with prompts and specific tasks/questions for students (Sheridan & Kelly, 2010)

- **Set reminders for yourself to do this!**

Be patient and reiterate important info…

….especially at the start of the course

Recap: Establishing Teaching Presence

BE PRESENT as a teacher (Sheridan & Kelly, 2010).

Communicate regularly.

Be consistent.

LACK OF CONSISTENCY CAN BRING ON A LACK OF INTEREST.

3. Teaching Presence: Feedback

Feedback as Direct Instruction

- **Feedback is an essential dialogue between you and your student.**

- **Respond within a week** (Sheridan & Kelly, 2010)

  - According to research, <u>timeliness</u> is key

- **Find a method that works for you**

  - Email, chat, recorded message?

  - Make it pleasant (or bearable) for you too!

  ❖ It should <u>not</u> be a chore

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Set RULES for submitted work

- Make <u>clear guidelines</u> for feedback at the <u>start of the course</u>

- Give parameters for the feedback "cycle"

- Tell students how to submit

  ❖ E.g. media (e.g. email), format (e.g. Word), even filename (for quick doc managmement)

- **The clearer you are the start, the fewer questions you will have to field later on**

  ❖ This saves you time

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Cognitive Engagement and Feedback

- **Clear and timely communication of feedback creates cognitive engagement**

  - Students critically reflect on concepts

  - This leads to deeper levels of thinking

  - Enhances students' responsiveness and engagement
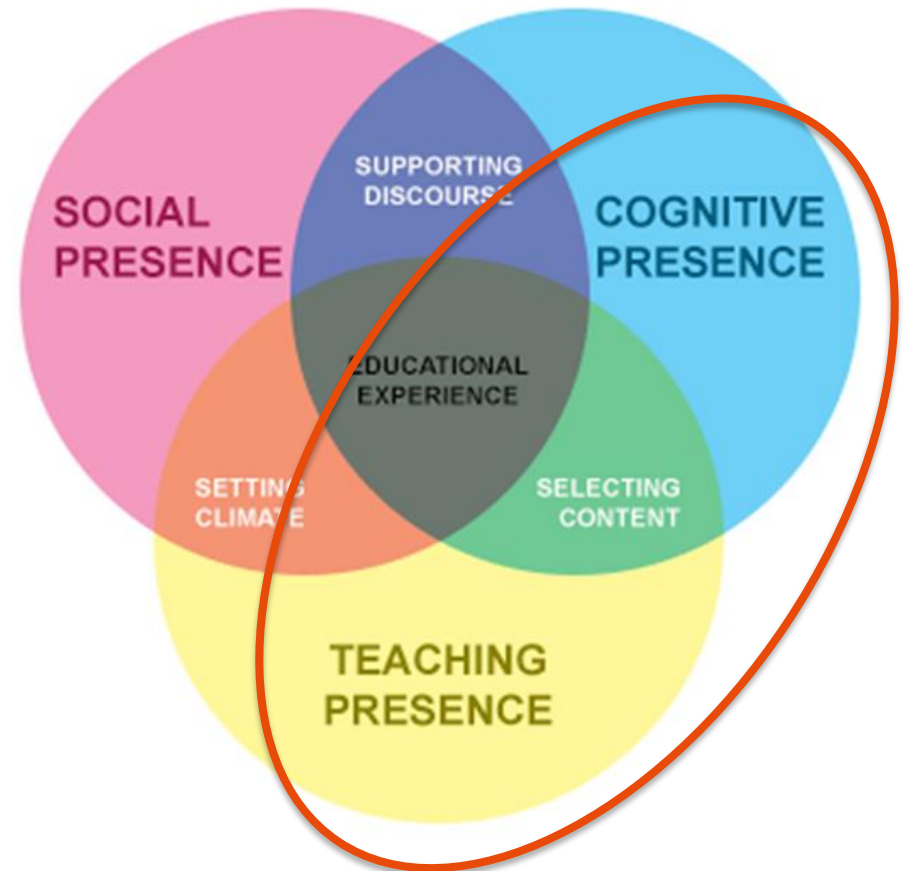
(Lowenthal, Pallof, & Pratt, 2003, cited in Sheridan & Kelly 2010)

4. Supporting Student Discourse

Community of Inquiry

Adapted from Garrison et al 2000, cited in Fiock 2020
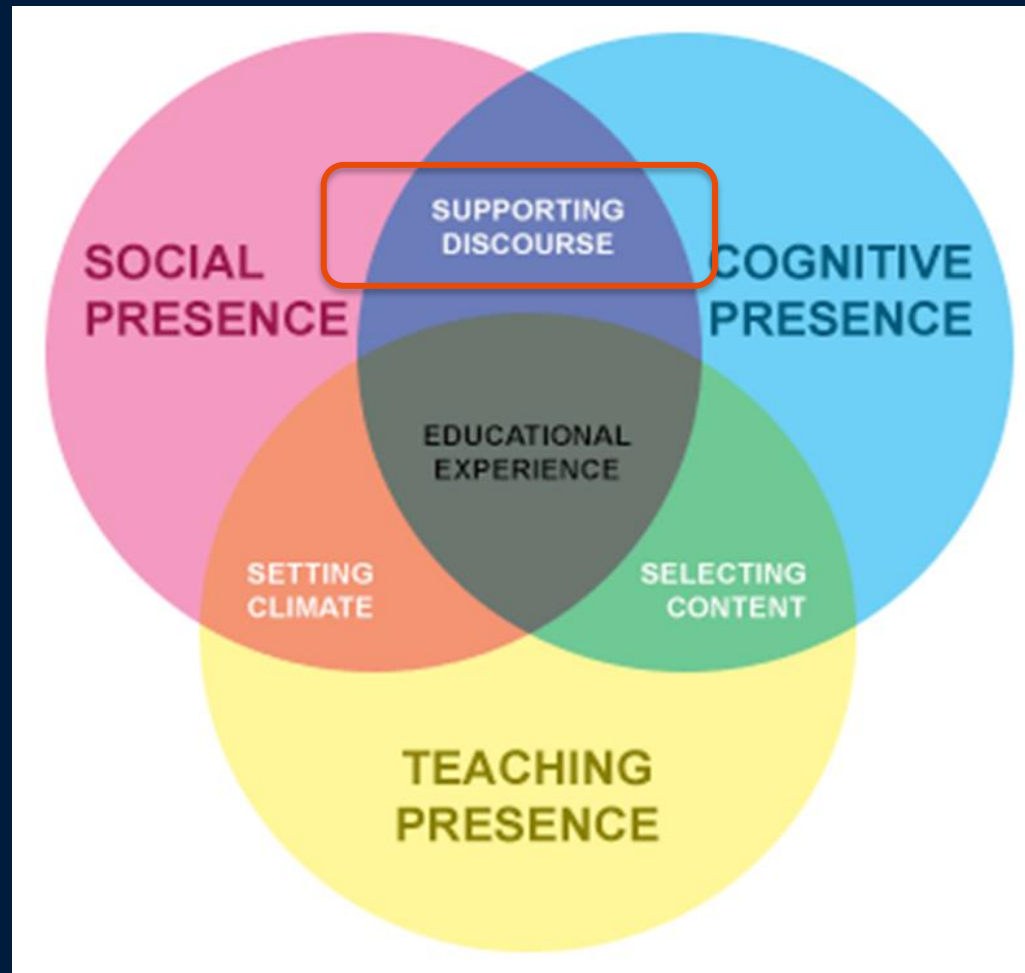
Support Student Discourse

- Online discussion between students is important to learning

- Set tasks / ask Qs to elicit interaction

- Keep an eye on students' posts

- Intermittently intervene with comments or questions to elicit further discussion

  - At least once a week

  - Your post need not be long

  - **Just be present!**

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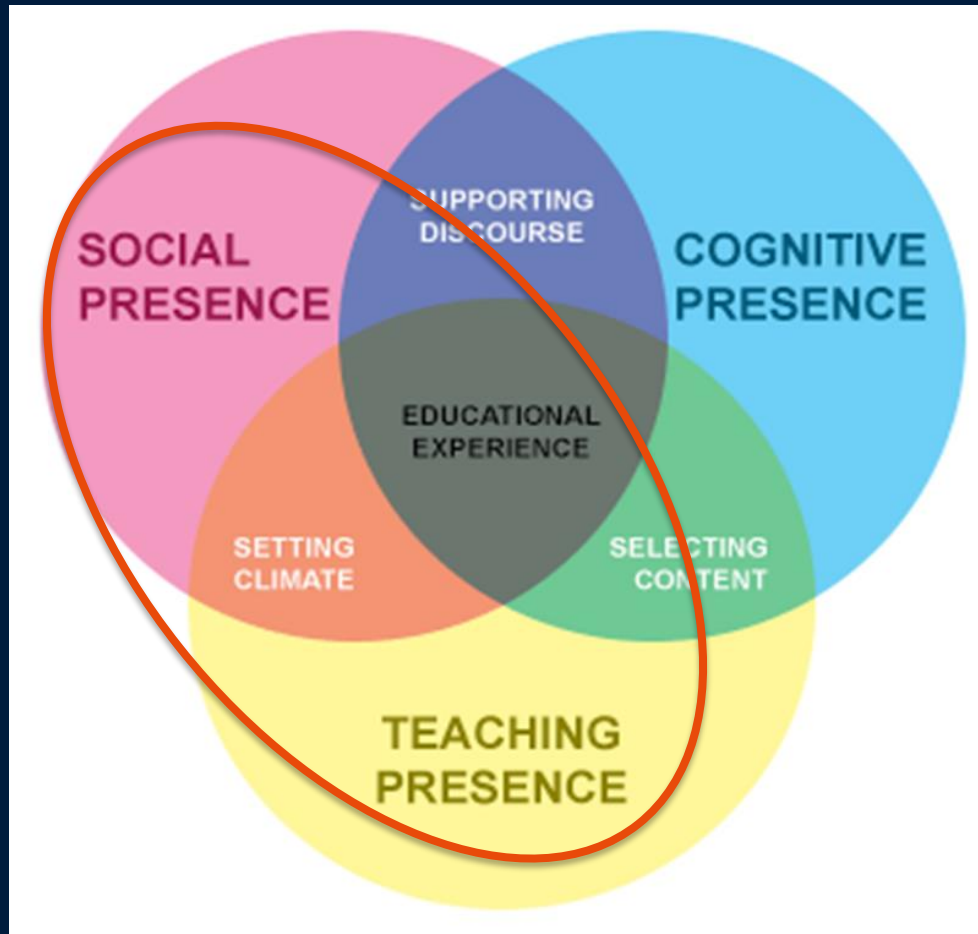# Students should know that you're there.

Your intervention could be used to

- Ask a question to elicit further discussion

- Reinforce students' understanding

- Summarize

- Diagnose misperceptions

- Provide information

- Address students' concerns

- Identify areas of agreement and disagreement

- Encourage and reinforce students' contributions

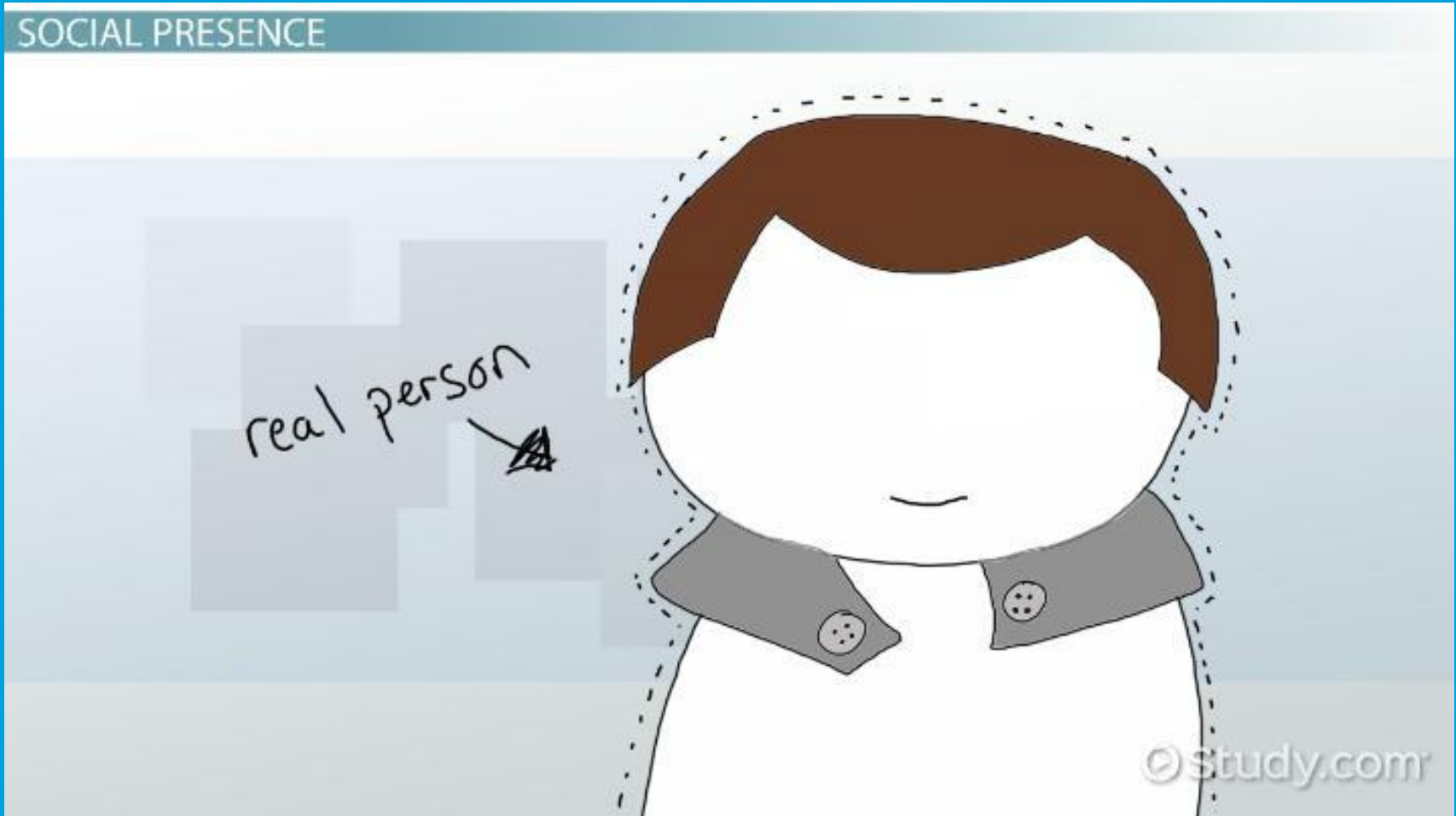(Anderson et al., 2001, cited in Sheridan & Kelly, 2010)

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5. Social Presence: Being Authentic

Community of Inquiry

Adapted from Garrison et al 2000, cited in Fiock 2020

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Engender social presence to create interest

Group Cohesion and Social Presence

- **Add a personal element to enhance social presence and group cohesion**
  - Personal Profile Pictures
  - Welcome messages (from you and the group)
  - Inclusion of students' personal experiences and feelings (Richardson 2017, cited in Fiock 2020)
  - Set up an informal chat space so that students can interact
    - ➢ Dip in and out with an emoticon (or not at all)

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Final words...
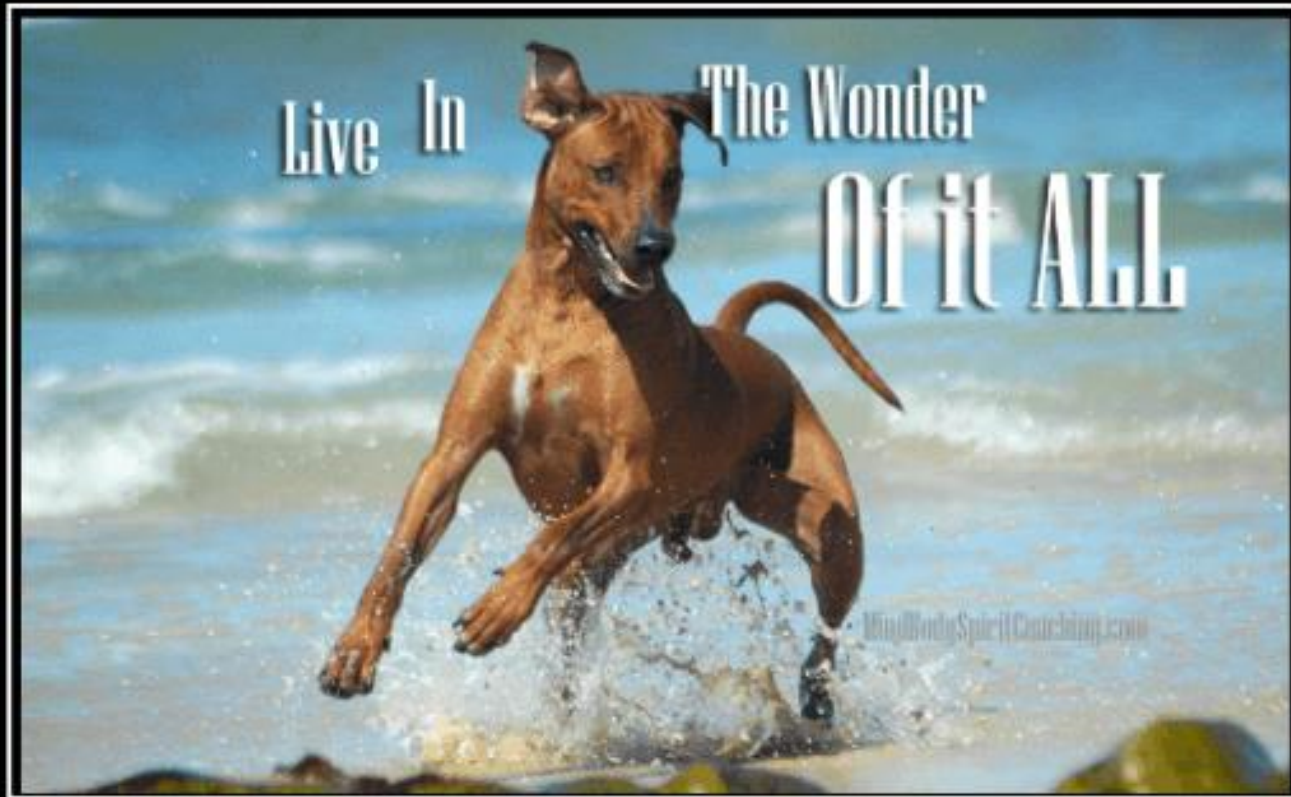
Conclusion

Communicating Effectively in Online Courses

- Create a sense of belonging

  - clear communication of shared of objectives

- Clear course structure and regular contact

- Provide feedback in a timely manner

- Support student discussion and discourse

- Encourage social presence

  - This will enhance group cohesion and improve communication

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References

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- Sheridan, K., & Kelly, M. A. (2010). The indicators of instructor presence that are important to students in online courses. *MERLOT Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, *6*(4), 767-779. Retrieved from https://jolt.merlot.org/vol6no4/sheridan_1210.pdf

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Thanks for coming!
Any questions?