# Instructing the Instructors: Training Instructors to Use

# Social Presence Cues in Online Courses

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## Abstract

Online learning has become an ever-evolving opportunity for students in all stages of life to achieve their educational goals while also participating in all of the other aspects of their lives. With all of the changes in online learning in the last decade, it is unfortunate that many online instructors have been left behind (Lackey, 2011). Instructors are hearing words like motivation, persistence, and retention, yet they do not know how to develop online courses that encourage their students to engage and interact with their classmates. They are unaware that assuring that they interject social presence into their online courses could change the entire atmosphere of a course. This study provided participating instructors with an online English composition course that encouraged participant interaction and engagement. Two of the instructors received an extra day of training, including details about social presence cues and using them in their online courses. The results demonstrated that "instructing the instructor" may help create a more inviting and engaging course for the participants, which further research may prove lends to the motivation, persistence, and retention most institutions are seeking today.

**Keywords:** Instructor training, motivation, elearning, learner persistence, learner retention

## INTRODUCTION

In 2005, researchers predicted that by the year 2010, online facilitation would be one of the most important aspects of online learning (Kim, Bonk, Zeng, 2005). However, even as

recently as 2012, researchers were still finding there was little discussion preparing instructors for teaching online courses (Terantino & Agbehona, 2012). With the ever-increasing numbers of universities providing virtual courses, it is imperative that institutions implement professional development and training opportunities for their instructors. In their book, examining the motivation and retention of online students, Lehman and Conceição (2014) state, "As online courses continue to grow in number, it is essential to provide quality course design, exemplary instructional strategies, and strong support to increase online retention" (p. 11).

Many online learning scholars are concerned the lack of training instructors receive prevents them from developing invigorating courses that create a sense of community as well as encourage engagement and interaction with other participants. Lehman and Conceição (2014) explain that a sense of trust often begins to develop in a course where online students recognize and "get to know" other students and the instructor, creating a much more positive online classroom environment. When instructors encourage social presence within their online classes, students start to recognize other participants are "real" and not just names on a screen. However, interjecting instances of social presence is not always easy or natural for an instructor. Shea and Bidjerano (2009) propose that when instructors are able to model the usage of social presence in their courses, participants are more likely to interact with others and engage in the course. Many times, when students are actively involved in a class, even one that is online, new discoveries are made, and courses that once seemed like they were just on a computer screen may come to life for all of the participants.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Many full-time faculty instructors, as well as adjuncts, have not received the training that they need to be able to fulfill the requirements that Lehman and Conceição (2014) see as vital to

motivating and retaining students. In their exploratory study, Bedford and Miller (2013) find that there are many misconceptions about adjuncts such as their preparedness and abilities to teach online courses. Just as with full-time instructors, there are many adjuncts providing a high-quality educational experience in their courses. However, there is a large contingency of both instructors, full-time and adjunct, in need of training and professional development opportunities. Educational institutions cannot expect their instructors to know how to design and deliver exemplary courses (Palloff & Pratt, 2013). Full-time instructors and adjuncts should be trained based on their present level of experience. They should have opportunities to work individually, with mentors, and collaboratively with other instructors. Training opportunities should include "best practices" demonstrations, providing instructors with opportunities to incorporate these into their own courses (Palloff & Pratt, 2011).

In their synthesis of literature on the effectiveness of online educators, Revere and Kovach (2011) recognize the significance of the training of instructors in the areas of design and student engagement. Based on the analysis of their findings, the authors determine many online courses are not designed to encourage peer interaction and student engagement because instructors have a limited understanding of the development, implementation, and facilitation of effective online courses. Institutions must find ways to train their instructors in these three areas of course implementation.

Lehman and Conceição (2014) recognize two types of support necessary for online instructors to receive. As previously mentioned, institutional instruction is one aspect of support. In recognizing the second aspect, instructional or developmental, Lehman and Conceição (2014) refer to the need for instructors to employ intentional design when developing their online courses. They explain the intentional design method as one, "that involves purposeful actions

and takes into consideration the online learning environment, the teaching process, and learner characteristics" (p. 19). In their study on motivation and retention, the authors found it is important instructors learn ways in which to create a sense of presence, community and trust among participants in their courses.

Croxton (2014) describes the implementation of a well-developed online course as one that provides "an active learning environment in which students are highly engaged in the learning process through interactions with peers, instructors, and content" (p. 315). The author emphasizes the need for this interactive environment by explaining when these experiences are missing, a student's learning and satisfaction may decrease. In their comparison of the attitudes of instructors and students, Eskey and Schulte (2012) conclude, "it is the responsibility of the instructor to create an open and inviting climate for communication. The instructor must set the tone for interactions via course tools such as discussion threads, course introductions, and grade book comments" (p. 3). In their book describing an "excellent online instructor," Palloff and Pratt (2011) suggest implementation of the course should begin with situations which build community and interactive discussions among the participants. Once these opportunities are implemented, then the instructor must change roles to become the facilitator.

In its online educational resource discussing the qualities of a successful online facilitator, the Illinois Online Network (2015) provides this thought, "Faculty must be more than transmitters of knowledge; they must become facilitators of learning (p. 1)." As important as the development and implementation of the course may be, the instructor's role as a facilitator determines the outcome of the course. Lehman and Conceição (2014) share many reasons for students dropping out of online courses: isolation, frustration, disconnection, lack of faculty contact, lack of instructor participation, and lack of social interaction (p.5).

Dykman and Davis (2008b) provide one definition of an effective online instructor as one who regularly interacts with his or her students. The authors propose there are times when the teacher is the "lifeline" for a student. They explain when online teachers regularly communicate with their students, they are displaying a sense of enthusiasm for the course, excitement about the material, and encouragement for returned interaction. Revere and Kovach (2011) recommend several ways in which an instructor may provide opportunities for interaction with students. One of the most common ways is with discussion board topics. With today's technology, there is software available to provide synchronous and asynchronous ways to connect with students such as Wimba and Collaborate. These and other similar types of software allow instructors to have virtual office hours, virtual classes, or recorded lectures so students are able to hear and see the instructor. When an instructor makes efforts to interact with students and encourage them to collaborate with one another, a sense of community can develop.

## Social Presence

Instructors should create more than just opportunities for students and instructors to interact on an individual basis. Online collaboration, using various forms of available technology, encourages students to think more deeply, both elaboratively and critically (Dykman & Davis, 2008a; Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2010; Palloff & Pratt, 2005). Collaboration among the participants in an online course may also create a more communal environment. This perception of connectedness, awareness of others, and/or a sense of intellectual community that participants experience in an online course through various forms of interaction and collaboration is referred to as *social presence*.

Many researchers have based their definitions of social presence on Short, Williams, and Christie's (1976) foundational description of *social presence* in a traditional classroom, which

describes to what degree people are perceived as being real by the other participants in a course (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997; Kehrwald (2008); Richardson & Swan, 2003; Wise, Chang, Duffy & Del Valle, 2004). Building on this earlier definition, Tu and McIsaac (2002) generated a definition specific to online courses which suggested that social presence is the recognition, and possibly acknowledgement, of another intellectual individual in the computer-mediated communication (CMC) environment. Tu and McIsaac describe this form of recognition as a "feeling, perception, and reaction."

**Two aspects of social presence.** As the concept on social presence has developed online, two categories have emerged in much of the literature. One aspect views social presence as a *perception* that other "real" people are also participating in the online course (Richardson & Swan, 2003; Tu & McIsaac, 2002; Wise, et al., 2004). A second aspect views social presence as an *action*. Researchers have described social presence as the moves that participants make to project themselves socially and academically into the online classroom. This concept of social presence is not about what the participants sense, both students and the instructor, but about what they do (Rourke, Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 1999; Wise, et al., 2004; Kehrwald, 2008).

**Instructors and social presence.** Much of the literature for online learning addresses course design without reference to the actions instructors should carry out. Several researchers propose it is the instructor's responsibility to develop activities promoting social presence and to encourage, maybe even insist, participants to engage in these activities in order to cultivate the interactions and involvement (Dykman & Davis, 2008a; Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997; Wise et al., 2004). Although much of the social presence literature delivers suggestions and practical experiences, there appears to be fewer studies providing instructors with foundational methods upon which they can build and implement their courses.

Wise and her colleagues (2004) provide a valuable finding in their study on social presence, emphasizing the instructor and his or her development of social presence their courses. The researchers suggest there are eight social presence cues that may increase the level of social presence within one of the courses in the study. The eight cues are "expressing humor, exhibiting emotions, providing self-disclosure, interjecting allusions to physical presence, using greetings, addressing people by name, complimenting others' ideas, and offering support or agreement for an idea." In their study on social presence cues, Wise and her colleagues (2004) found that students in groups in which instructors used "high levels" of social presence wrote messages twice as long and exhibited more social presence cues in their replies to their instructor than those students in the treatment using fewer cues.

**Social presence cues.** Adopting the concept that social presence is an action and something instructors may do to project themselves into the class, two distinct categories of social presence cues emerged: *revealing the instructor* and *recognizing the participants* (Rourke et al., 1999; Wise et al., 2004). Four of the social presence cues can be categorized as those revealing *the instructor*. An instructor's expression of his or her sense of *humor* in an online course allows the students to see the instructor as being engaged and "present" in the course. The instructor's exhibition of *emotions* also creates a better sense of a real person as he or she may express feelings through words, by using emoticons :O), or with capitalization and punctuation. *Providing self-disclosure* about life outside of the classroom is another way in which instructors are able to indicate that they are an individual human presence. Finally, *interjecting allusions of physical presence* (using words like *we* or *our class*,) may suggest the instructor's *physical presence* and thus make the participant feel connected to both the instructor and other participants (Figure 1).

| Social cues that reveal the instructor | Social cues that recognize the other participants |
|---|---|
| • Expressing humor | • Using greetings |
| • Exhibiting emotions | • Addressing people by name |
| • Providing self-disclosure | • Complimenting others' ideas |
| • Interjecting allusions of physical presence | • Offering support or agreement for an idea |

*Figure 1.* Two categories of social presence cues (Adapted from Rourke, Anderson, Garrison, & Archer, 1999 and Wise, Chang, Duffy, & Del Valle, 2004).

As noted above, the other four social cues may be described as those recognizing the other participants. *Using greetings* in exchanges creates a more social environment. *Addressing people by name* in communications is one method of demonstrating students' significance in the online course. The *Complimenting of others' ideas* on insights or assignments might provide a sense of ownership within the class, and the instructor's positive reinforcement may encourage other students to project themselves in the course. *Offering support or agreement for an idea* signals to participants that the instructor is involved in the class, and it makes the participants "see" others in the class as well.

**METHODS**

This study modeled an online composition course designed to encourage both instructors and students to use social presence to develop a sense of community and enhance critical thinking on the discussion board and in essays. Rather than an experimental and a control group, this study employed two different treatments. The **Cognitive** treatment provided English composition instructors with instruction on critical thinking and argument development. The **Situational** treatment offered the same instruction, yet it included an extra day, providing training in using social presence cues when interacting with students. The study was implemented in three sections: pre-training, training, and post-training.

The instructors participating in the study were invited from a population of thirteen instructors scheduled to teach for the designated university during that term. Four adjunct instructors consented to participate in the study. Students in these instructors' classes were invited to participate in the study. Instructors were not allowed to have more than twenty-five students in a course; therefore, approximately 113 students were enrolled in the four instructors' courses (one instructor had two courses). Fifty students agreed to participate in the study by permitting the instructors to collect their course work. Of the 50 participating students, 17 were from classes taught by the "cognitive" instructors, and the remaining 33 were assigned to the "situational" instructors.

At the time this study was implemented, the university offered classes that were designated for military members. The students in the other classes were from the general population. Most of the students in these online classes also had vocational careers in addition to their educational pursuits. It is noteworthy that, during the time of this study, the military students were often in difficult and dangerous situations and sometimes experienced limited internet access. Because of these situations, military students often hesitated to participate in anything that might seem like additional work, such as the discussion board, and they were sometimes uncomfortable with providing personal information, perhaps due to the nature of their occupations.

Each participating instructor agreed to implement the course design the researcher developed for the online nine-week ENG 1102 course. The instructors also agreed to participate in a two-week online training session during the term. The instructors were randomly assigned to one of the two different treatments. The participating instructors were not made aware of any variance in the two treatments. The training description stated it provided the instructors with

information on increasing students' critical thinking and high-argument development in online freshmen composition courses.

The four participating instructors completed a two-week training session the researcher designed in a Blackboard shell. The instructors were only able to view the treatment to which they were assigned. Instructors 1 and 3 were in the cognitive treatment training, and instructors 2 and 4 were in the situational treatment training. The instructors were presented with each week's training separately. The training was developed by using Wimba collaborative learning software and Power Point. Each training session also included a manuscript. The instructors in both treatments participated in seven sessions, grounded in literature pertinent to critical thinking and written argumentation. In addition to this information, the training for the situational treatment instructors included the initial session on social presence and social presence cues (See Appendix A for brief outline of situational treatment training). Throughout the training, the instructors were asked to interact with each other, participate in discussion board assignments, and complete assignments similar to those they were using in their ENG 1102 courses. It was interesting to note that the instructors in the situational treatment, which promoted social interaction, communicated with each other regularly during the term, but the instructors in the cognitive treatment did not.

The four instructors were provided with all of the assignments and information needed in the ENG 1102 course, in order to pursue high quality implementation of both treatments. The instructors were asked not to alter the assignments in any way, but they were encouraged to adapt the class to fit their individual personalities (e.g. changing the phrasing of non-assignment aspects of the course to blend in with their own "voice" in the online class, adding encouraging statements for the students, and adding announcements as they deemed necessary for their

students.) These instructors taught ENG 1102 in a previous term, so they were familiar with the standardized syllabus and course requirements.

During the pre-training time (weeks 1 and 2), there was no difference between the two treatments. The divergence of the two treatments began during the training sessions (weeks 3 and 4). The situational treatment training provided one day when the instructors learned about social presence, foundational research, and the eight social presence cues that could be significant in online classes. The training began with a basic explanation and discussion of social presence, assuming that the instructors might not know the term. After the definition had been established, the situational instructors were given information on two positions of social presence: *perception* and *action*. The training provided details for several key empirical studies and included a discussion on the value of social presence in the online classroom, focusing on Palloff and Pratt's experiences. The section of training on social presence cues concluded by suggesting that the instructors consider how they might incorporate social presence cues in their online classrooms and to also designate both the possible positive and negative aspects of incorporating social presence cues into their online courses.

The researcher intended to coach the two situational instructors to use more social presence cues in their classes during weeks 5 and 6 (post-training). Due to the rapid pace of the course and the abundance of new material the instructors received during the training, compiled with their teaching requirements, the researcher determined that it was best to email the instructors weekly to remind and encourage them to consider social presence cues that were presented to them during the training. The two emails are provided below.

(Week 5)

*Hi Instructors,*

*I see that your students have already posted to discussion board #5. As you respond*

*remember the social presence cues we discussed in the training. Have a great day! :O)*

(Week 6)

*Hi Instructors,*

*I hope you are having a great week. As you reply to the students' postings in discussion*

*board #6, don't forget to consider social presence in your responses. Thanks! :O)*

Two English instructors, not participants in the study, volunteered to be research

assistants, counting the students' and instructors' use of social presence cues in the discussion

board postings.  In order to establish interrater agreement, the researcher created a social

presence cues tally sheet, providing a guide explaining each cue and a variety of examples of

each of the social presence cues (see Appendix B for the guide). The tally sheet provided a place

for the assistants to mark each instance of social presence in the samples (see Appendix C for the

sheet). In order to remain consistent in scoring, the researcher and assistants determined that they

would score the occurrences of the eight social presence cues discussed on the guide. In order to

establish interrater agreement for determining the use of social presence cues on the discussion

board, the researcher summed the total number of social presence cues that the researchers found

in the same category and then divided the number by the total reported social presence cues.

Interrater agreement for the occurrence of social presence cues was 91%.

The first hypothesis predicted the instructors in the situational treatment would use more

social presence cues after the training than they did prior to the experience. The tally sheet that

was developed allowed the scorers to measure the number of both the instructors' and students'

social presence cues in each discussion board posting. The incidences of social presence cues were entered into SPSS and analyzed using repeated measures. The pre-training social presence cues helped the researcher establish an understanding as to whether the instructor might already be using social presence cues.

The second hypothesis predicted the incidence of instructor social presence cues would correlate with the incidence of students' social presence cues in discussion board postings. Pearson correlation was employed to determine the relationship between the total number of instructor social presence cues and those of the students.

## FINDINGS

The means for three of the four instructors' incidence of social presence cue usage increased from the pre-training to the post-training postings (Instructor 1 did not participate on the discussion board). The means for the students' incidence of social presence cues, however, did not increase as expected. Only the students with instructor 2 had an increase in the mean for the incidence of social presence cues usage after the situational treatment instructors' training (Table 1).

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics for Social Presence Cues and Achievement by Instructor and Treatment*

| Instructor | Variables | Time | Mean (Std.) | Instructor | Variables | Time | Mean (Std.) | Cog avg. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 (cognitive) | Instructor cues | Pre | .000 (.000) | 3 (cognitive) | Instructor cues | Pre | 2.333 (2.338) | 1.167 (1.169) |
| | | Post | .000 (.000) | | | Post | 6.167 (3.642) | 3.084 (1.821) |
| | Student cues | Pre | .591 (.917) | | Student cues | Pre | .917 (1.429) | .322 (1.173) |
| | | Post | .546 (.789) | | | Post | .917 (.917) | .732 (.853) |

| Instructor | Variables | Time | Mean (Std.) | Instructor | Variables | Time | Mean (Std.) | Sit avg. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 (situational) | Instructor cues | Pre | 6.833 (3.661) | 4 (situational) | Instructor cues | Pre | .833 (1.060) | 3.833 (2.361) |
| | | Post | 9.291 (4.369) | | | Post | 3.611 (1.884) | 6.451 (3.127) |
| | Student cues | Pre | 1.896 (2.498) | | Student cues | Pre | 1.056 (1.333) | 1.476 (1.916) |
| | | Post | 1.979 (2.712) | | | Post | .833 (.7071) | 1.406 (1.710) |

**Cognitive treatment instructors.** As previously noted, instructor 1 did not participate on the discussion board, but she did use the provided discussion board questions. She recently had acquired a new job that demanded more of her time than she had initially thought it would. It can be noted there was a minimal amount of social presence cues usage by her students. During the pre-training, instructor 3 participated infrequently on the discussion board, demonstrating fewer incidences of social presence cues. There was a notable difference in the means for Instructor 3's participation and use of social presence cues on the discussion board from pre-training to post-training. There was a 3.834 increase in the mean on the instructor's social presence cues. There was also an increase in the standard deviation scores. Even though the mean for incidences of students' social presence cues remained the same prior to and after the training, the standard deviation increased slightly.

**Situational treatment instructors.** Both Instructor 2 and Instructor 4 participated on the discussion board and used the provided discussion board questions. The mean for the pre-training incidences of social present usage was higher than any of the other instructors' results, reporting that Instructor 2 interacted with the students using social presence cues prior to the situational training. Even with the high mean in the pre-training discussion board postings, Instructor 2's mean increased significantly on the post-training discussion board postings. Of the four instructors, Instructor 2 was the only one to have an increase on the students' incidence of social presence cues usage. Instructor 2's class population consisted of students that were civilians and possibly military members using tuition assistance.

There is also a visible increase in the means for Instructor 4's incidence of social presence cues usage on the pre-training and the post-training discussion board postings. Instructor 4's class consisted of soldiers in the military program. As mentioned previously, the

decrease might be explained due to the non-disclosure of personal information and sedulous

lifestyle of a military student.

When reviewing the average scores for the two situational treatment instructors, one will

recognize a very modest increase in the mean and a small increase in the standard deviation for

instructors' usage of social presence cues in the post-training segment. A decrease in both the

mean and standard deviation scores for students' usage of social presence cues remains.

**Statistical significance.** The first hypothesis stated that after the training in the use of

social presence cues, instructors would use the cues more than they did prior to the training.

There was an increased mean and standard deviation in the post-training social presence cues

usage by the situational treatment instructors (Table 2).  A two-level within-subjects analysis of

variance (ANOVA) was completed in order to assess whether or not the instructors' use of social

presence cues after training differ at a statistically significant level. Alpha was set at .05, and the

results were statistically significant, $F (1,32)= (.307, p= .005)$. Thus, the results indicate the

situational instructors used more social presence cues after their training. Additionally, the effect

size was large, $\eta= .225$. Because the treatment reached a statistical significance, the null

hypothesis was rejected.

Table 2

*Descriptive Statistics for the Independent Variables (instructor pre-training social presence*

*cues) and the Dependent Variable (instructors' post-training social presence cues)*

| | Instructor Pre-training social presence cues Mean (Std.) | Instructor Post-training social presence cues Mean (Std.) |
|---|---|---|
| **Situational Treatment** | 5.197 (4.157) | 7.742 (4.605) |
| **Cognitive Treatment** | .824 (1.741) | 2.177 (3.757) |

$N$ = 50 students

The second hypothesis stated the instructors' incidences of social presence cues would correlate with the students' incidences of social presence cues usage. Pearson correlations were used to determine if a correlation was present. The results determined there was a correlation between instructors' and students' use of social presence cues on the discussion board (r= .332, p= .018). Because the findings were statistically significant, the null hypothesis was rejected.

A second correlation was run to analyze the pre-training and post-training usage of social presence cues, disaggregated according to whether before or after training, to see if there was a correlation between the students' and the instructors' social presence cues based on having experienced the training. The findings showed there was a correlation that achieved statistical significance between instructors' and students' pre-training use of social presence cues (r= .300, p= .034). The instructors who demonstrated more usage of social presence cues pre-training, also had students who used social presence cues as well. The correlation between the students' and instructors' use of social presence cues in the post-training discussion board postings achieved statistical significance (r= .328, p =.020). This correlation explained the instructors using more social presence cues in the post-training had students using more social presence cues as well. There was a strong correlation between the instructors' pre-training and post-training usage of social presence cues (r= .571, p= .000). This correlation explained the instructors using more social presence cues prior to the training also used more social presence cues after the training.

A final observation was the correlation between students' use of social presence on the discussion boards during their instructors' pre-training and post-training. These findings demonstrated a correlation (r= .541, p= .000) pointing out that the students using social presence cues prior to the instructors' training continued using social presence cues after the training.

## DISCUSSION

This study was designed and implemented to determine if the instructors trained in social presence cues would use them more after the training and to observe whether the instructors' use of social presence cues influenced the students' usage. A limitation to the study is the small sample size. This could lend to limited generalization; therefore, further research on the benefits of training instructors on social presence cues is needed.

The situational instructors' usage of social presence cues increased after their training. Because the situational instructors did not realize the training on social presence was part of the training for all of the instructors, further research might consider the instructors' usage of social presence cues after a training session in which they are told that the social presence cues is an important feature. It is worth noting that Instructor 3, in the cognitive treatment, also had an increase in the usage of social presence cues after the training. Since she did not receive any social presence training, some of the increase might be due to situational changes in time constraints or personality.

Although there was a correlation between the student-instructor usages of social presence, only Instructor 2 had an increase in the students' usage of social presence cues after the training. Instructor 4 actually had a slight decrease, possibly due to the students' military classification. Future research might determine ways in which instructors may encourage or evoke more social presence cues from their students.

The discussion board is only one area of an online classroom in which both the instructors' and students' social presence cues may be measured and analyzed for implementation and successful outcomes. Future research might also collect email and personal Blackboard interactions as well to determine if social presence cues are used in less academic means of communicating. In their study to determine if an instructor's motivational emails, using social presence cues, affected students' motivation and performance, Robb and Sutton (2014)

found an association between emails encouraging students' performance and the final grades in the courses. Email is only one of several inexpensive and easy sources instructors could implement, attempting to interject more social presence occurrences into their courses. By collecting data from these sources, a researcher might gain a better overall view of the participants' usage of social presence cues and the impact these cues have on student motivation and retention.

After completing further research on the instructors' and students' usage of social presence cues in various areas of an online course, a student satisfaction survey might be used to determine if the students recognized a difference when more social presence cues were used in the course. The survey could also measure if the usage of the social presence cues seemed to increase the students' perceptions of community, and if, consequently, these perceptions encouraged and motivated the students to participate and excel more within the course. In his qualitative study on students' experiences with social presence in an online course, Kehrwald (2008) provided a definition of social presence that describes it as a means by which online participants let other participants know they are present in the class, open to discussion, and receptive to exchanges of thoughts and ideas that could provide learning opportunities in the virtual environment. Considering Kehrwald's (2008) definition of social presence as one's way of indicating not only his or her attendance in the class but also indicating the desire to be an active participant, one may see this particular definition of social presence as an important concept, and perception, in an online course. Many researchers have completed surveys and studies, measuring students' perceptions of social presence and community in online courses. There is a new area of exploration in determining if positive perceptions lead to student engagement, retention, and success in the courses.

Creating an instructor satisfaction survey might also prove valuable in future research. In this study, the perceptions of three of the four instructors who participated was that they were pleased with how the students interacted on the discussion board postings. Although instructor 4 had previously assigned discussion board postings with a certain number of postings for her students, both Instructors 2 and 3 found this type of discussion board interaction to be an element that they would encourage in future classes. When asked if she would continue to use the discussion board postings in this way, Instructor 2 replied,

*Instructor 2*

*Yes, because I really believe this is going to result in happier students who feel they had a more "real" experience that usual in an online course. This added an element of community that most discussion boards don't.*

One should note instructor satisfaction might be influenced by the amount of training an instructor has received. Just as *social presence* may prove to be valuable within a course, there are also two other types of presence that are important (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000; Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2010). In their description of a community of inquiry, Garrison and his colleagues (2000) suggested that *cognitive presence* refers to the participants' recognition, exploration, understanding and perspective of a question. The authors asserted the teacher is a critical part of this model, and the teacher's presence must be in place in order for their model to be successful. *Teacher presence* is more than having a teacher acknowledge he or she is a part of the course; this type of presence includes designing the course, establishing a positive environment, and facilitating discussions that encourage students to make meaning of the information provided. That is, the instructor facilitates the students explicitly filling in gaps in source materials such as assigned source texts and constructing understanding in the domain

of the course that integrates the students' pre-existing frames of reference and the domain of the course.

*Teacher presence* does not come naturally to many online instructors. Many instructors could benefit from online training in the three areas mentioned above. In their study on the community of inquiry model, Shea and Bidjerano (2009) derived that much of the students' demonstration of cognitive presence was determined by their instructor's abilities in fostering teacher and social presence. Future research based on this concept of training instructors to use social presence cues in the online classroom (teacher presence) and promoting social presence among participants within that environment, could prove to be one way to arrive at the goal of cognitive presence, the students gaining a better understanding of the information being presented. In conjunction with these findings, researchers might be able to determine the significance of the demonstration of social, teacher, and cognitive presences on the motivation, persistence, and retention of online students.

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Appendix A

*Situational Treatment Training*

The situational treatment provides the same training as the cognitive treatment, with minor assignment abbreviations, except for Week 1, Day 2. Due to the adjustment of the training schedule, the situational treatment training runs differently until Week 2, Day 2. At that point, the training for both treatments is the same.

Day 1—Introduction

✓ The instructors will be assigned to view the PowerPoint including the following:
  - o I will introduce myself to the instructors
  - o I will ask instructors to introduce themselves to each other
  - o I will introduce the instructors to the cognitive training
  - o I will introduce instructors to the discussion board (DB) for our training
  - o I will suggest instructors have discussion board guidelines and ask them to post their top five guidelines
✓ The instructors will post DB #1, "Getting to know my peer," and provide information about themselves to share with their training buddy.

Day 2—Session 1     Social presence cues (PowerPoint)

✓ The instructors will review a PowerPoint that discusses the following:
  - o The instructors will review a definition of social presence based on empirical and practitioner literature.
  - o I will provide the instructors with information on what the studies say about social presence.
  - o I will challenge the instructors to consider the value of social presence.
  - o The instructors will receive training about social presence cues.
✓ Instructors will be required to use social presence cues, when appropriate, when responding to all discussion board postings throughout the training.

Day 3—Session 2     Critical thinking, reading, and argument development (PowerPoint)

  - o Instructors will review definitions and discussion on critical thinking, critical reading, and argument development. The instructors will consider the importance of these concepts in a student's learning.
  - o I will present my 8 subprocesses of written argumentation in the information about argument development.
✓ The instructors will read peer's posting for DB #1

Day 4—Instructors will respond to the question on DB #2. How might we adapt the subprocesses of the argument to change our jargon to something the students will understand? The instructors will be asked to provide a revised version of the subprocesses that would be better for our students.

Day 5—Session 3      Engaged readers (PowerPoint)

- o The instructor will view a session on a historical review of Dewey and engagement.
- o  Instructors will be presented a definition and discussion of engaged readers.
- o Instructors will be encouraged to deliberate on why instructors should want students to become engaged readers.
- o This session will conclude with an explanation of how instructors may help students become engaged readers.
- ✓ The instructors will respond to DB #2 and read each others' revised subprocesses of an argument. They will be required to share thoughts, comments, and/or suggestions to their peer.

Day 6—Session 4      Questioning (PowerPoint)

- ✓ The instructors will view a PowerPoint including the following:
  - o One feature of this session will be my discussion of questioning as a method of encouraging students to go deeper in the story.
  - o The instructor will also receive information on observing the text.
  - o Creating questions using Bloom's taxonomy.
- ✓ The instructors will review all previous discussion boards to read and make any final comments.

Day 7—off

Week 2

Day 1—Trying it Out

For this training day the instructors will participate in a reading assignment similar to the one they gave their students in week 1 of the term.

- ✓ The instructors will read the short story "The Story of an Hour (p 215)." http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/webtexts/hour/
- ✓ They will be directed to read over the provided question heuristic so that they will be considering the questions as they read a second time.
- ✓ The instructors will read the short story again.
- ✓ The instructors will revisit DB #2 and post DB #3 and share their thoughts about the short story. They will be required to tell their training buddy what they liked (or didn't like) about it. Also, they will share their thoughts on the author's craft in the story such as with

the literary devices (e.g., ways the author crafted character, setting, plot, etc.). They will also be invited to share anything else they would like.

*The situational treatment training will coincide with the cognitive from this point until the end.

Appendix B

*Detailed Description of Social Presence Cues for Discussion Board Research Assistants*

Social cues that *reveal* the instructor

Social cues that *recognize* other participants

- Expressing humor
- Exhibiting emotions
- Providing self-disclosure
- Interjecting allusions of physical presence

- Using greetings
- Addressing people by name
- Complimenting others' ideas
- Offering support or agreement for an idea

*Figure 1. Two categories of social presence cues (Rourke et al., 1999; Wise et al., 2004).*

Social cues that *reveal* the instructor

Expressing humor

- Telling jokes *(an actual joke)*
- Sharing humorous experiences or stories *(sharing an " I remember the time" kind of story or experience that is upbeat and/or humorous)*

Exhibiting emotions

- Using emoticons such as :O) or :O(
- Using words in caps for emphasis
- Using punctuation marks for emphasis *(any use of explanation points only)*

Providing self disclosure

- Sharing personal stories *(any kind of "I remember the time" story or experience)*
- Providing background information *(sharing family, friend, occupation, or other personal information)*
- Sharing plans or dreams *(sharing of goals, plans, dreams, hopes etc)*

Interjecting allusions of physical presence

- Using terms such as *today in class*, *our class*, *your classmates, etc.*
- Saying things like *working in groups*, *I'm glad to be with you today, I really enjoyed our time together, etc.*

- Using terms that sounds as if students are in same room with instructor like *welcome to our class, join me as we…., Let's turn in our books etc.*

Social cues that *recognize* the other participants

Using greetings

- Using terms such as *hi, hello, welcome, greetings, or any other type of greeting that you recognize.*

Addressing people by name

- Using one's name when replying to a comment, providing feedback, or offering suggestions.

Complimenting others' ideas

- Pointing toward others' ideas (*You should read John's and Fred's postings; they discussed the same ideas that you did or Have you read Sally's posting? She discusses the same ideas ( or something referring to something someone else said).*
- Recognizing the really strong points someone makes *(Susan made this same great observation; check hers out)*
- Suggesting that one participant correspond with another *(Why don't you email or correspond with Jacob and share your thoughts about the story?)*

Offering support or agreement for an idea

- Providing other suggestions to support established ideas *(I think you are on the right track. I thought that she really died from something other than a heart attack too. Remember she created a whole new life for herself while she was in her room* or *I do think that Cross was creating a whole life with her in his mind. She really did not do anything to indicate she felt the same way.)*
- Sharing similar opinions in agreement for an idea *(similar to above)*
- Agreeing with points already made and then suggesting further thoughts
  *(I agree with you that she died more from just a heart attack. Tell me what you think the Chopin means when she writes "the joy that kills." Or I agree with you that the literary devices really make this story more exciting. Give me a few more examples of the literary devices from the story that really help the reader "get into" it.*

Appendix C

*Social Presence Cues Instrument*

This simplistic instrument is designed to help the outside readers determine the number of social presence cues present in the discussion board postings.

Social cues that *reveal* the instructor

| Social presence cue | Number of social presence cues in posting |
|---|---|
| Expressing humor | |
| Exhibiting emotions | |
| Providing self disclosure | |
| Interjecting allusions of physical presence | |

Social cues that *recognize* the other participants

| Social presence cue | Number of social presence cues in posting |
|---|---|
| Using greetings | |
| Addressing people by name | |
| Complimenting others' ideas | |
| Offering support or agreement of an idea | |